CODE GEASS

OZ The Reflection

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SIDE:ORPHEUS

コードギアス

CODE GEASS

双貌のオズ

OZ The Reflection

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Chapter 1

His Codename is “Oz”

What cruel twist of fate could have brought this about? Orpheus Zevon and Oldrin Zevon, the two “Ozs,” who share the same face, destined to cross paths. One is a terrorist who rides a white fang; the other, a knight entrusted with a crimson sword. In the year 2017 of the Imperial Calendar, the story begins to unfold with the meeting of these two opposites.

Chapter 1: His Codename is “Oz”

It has been over half a year since the North African region that faces the Mediterranean Sea was conquered by Britannia. For the sake of invading the inland areas next, Britannia has piled up a large quantity of goods in the city of Béjaïa that lied on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and was making preparations to attack.

The mission of Orpheus’s group was to destroy this storehouse of goods. The method used to do this was ignored.

“However, there is one condition for Oz from the client.”

The intermediary Miss X called Orpheus by his codename.

“Please thoroughly disguise the destruction of the storehouse so that it looks like an accident.”

“Understood.”

Orpheus gave a short reply. There was no need to hear the client’s identity or the reason for making that kind of condition. That was the style of the mercenary force Peace Mark’s destruction operative, Oz.

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The bustle in Béjaïa did not seem to have changed since before the occupation. In fact, one could even say that the city was more prosperous than before. Orpheus and Zi, using false identifications and taking advantage of the evening crowd in the city, managed to infiltrate without difficulty. Soon, they found the supply depot they were looking for.

They entered through the main gate as if it were the most natural thing and turned their attention toward the Sakuradite warehouse. To store highly pure, military-grade sakuradite, it was necessary to apply complex and specialized stabilization measures. In other words: if those measures went wrong, the Sakuradite would easily become unstable and could explode, wiping out the entire surrounding area. On a battlefield, technical errors were commonplace.

In front of the Sakuradite warehouse stood two guards. From their rank, the cut of their uniforms, and their bearing, it was clear they were elite soldiers with a high level of training and discipline. Fake IDs would likely be of no use.

"It's your turn," said Zi.

Orpheus did not reply. But at that moment, his eye shone with an unnatural light. At the same time, his appearance began to undergo a transformation. The face of the young man—handsome, yet carrying a malicious air—became that of a pompous-looking middle-aged man. His clothing changed as well, turning into a flamboyantly decorated military uniform.

"Who do I look like?"

The man that had been Orpheus Zevon several seconds before looked over at Zi with an aristocratic-like voice.

"From head to toe, like a gaudy-looking big shot of the Britannian army."

"Correct."

The Britannian officer grinned. Zi shrugged his shoulders.

"No matter how many times I see it, watching that always makes a chill go down my spine. Just how on earth are you able to do that?"

Orpheus could freely become anyone. He perfectly copied not only a person's appearance, but also their voice and gestures. The power known as Geass tricked the brains of all those who saw Orpheus. However, its effective time was about 5 minutes. Since the time of the deception ended with any warning, he couldn't accurately predict the timing. Moreover, once activated, Orpheus had to wait at least an hour before he could use it again. But, compared to the benefits of this ability, such conditions were insignificant restrictions.

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"This is an inspection of compliance inventory. Open the Sakuradite storehouse."

Orpheus's order was accepted without any questions. Once the sentries opened the storeroom, Orpheus quickly killed them, and then deactivated his Geass and invited in Zi, who had been hiding. They tampered the Sakuradite's stabilization storage system, and then promptly headed towards the town exit. However, Orpheus's feet stopped.

"What's wrong?"

"Someone's watching us."

A strange sense of danger. It was definitely the strange sensation of being watched—.

"You people over there. Wait a moment."

A young Britannian noble stopped both of them. His attire showed that he was a knight—one who pilots Knightmare. Approaching with several armed soldiers, his expression eloquently

indicated that he didn't have the attitude of facing natives who happened to be passing by.

They couldn't be caught here. They both drew their weapons as they threw off their costumes and fired. Two of the armed soldiers were killed. Then, they threw smoke grenades, and the enemy's sight was taken away. All at once the surroundings were wrapped in yells and screams. Taking advantage of the confusion, the two of them ran towards the town exit. But…

"Stop!"

A Sutherland Knightmare remodeled for desert battle came rushing out from within the smoke. The voice streaming out from its speaker was that of a young girl.

"Don't let them get away, Sokkia!"

The knight who first called out to Orpheus and Zi shouted that. The Sutherland piloted by the woman called Sokkia fired a Slash Harken. In front of the running Orpheus and Zi, the tough high polymer wire got in their path. Orpheus quickly slid and passed under the wire. However, Zi hooked his chest on the wire and was flung backwards in recoil. He rushed to stand up, but the Britannian soldiers had already caught up with him. Several new Knightmares were also headed towards him.

"Drop your weapon and surrender!"

The voice from the Sutherland ordered this. At that instant, the earthen wall that surrounded the town was broken through and a huge military-use trailer rushed out. The trailer drifted using a strong braking maneuver and threw out its sturdy storage-container towards the Sutherland. The Sutherland barely jumped out of the way, but it plunged into a business building behind it. The building crumbled and rubble rained down on the Sutherland.

"Nice timing, Ganabati!"

"Don't rejoice so soon. Fresh supplies of troops are joining in."

Just as Orpheus said, there were four Sutherlands trailing them and closely approaching. Orpheus and Zi rushed over to the trailer.

"Open up. I'm going out in the Byakuen!"

Once Ganabati opened the container, a catapult palette loaded with a white Knightmare came out from inside. It had an unusual headpiece that made one think of a giant beetle, and an abnormally huge right arm. This was Orpheus Zevon's exclusive personal frame, the Type-01/C "Byakuen".

"Catapult opened. Byakuen, launching!"

Through a compressed magnetic field, the Byakuen was shot out from the container. While still in the air, Orpheus transformed the Byakuen's right arm and unfolded an electromagnetic cannon.

"This is—my fang!

The high-pitched roar characteristic of ultra-high output electromagnetic acceleration resounded twice. Whirling up a cloud of dust whirling from the supersonic shock wave, the 4 sabot-type 30mm high-initial-velocity Tungsten armor-piercing ammunitions that fired at 0.78 seconds intervals were guided by the aim of the Byakuen's enhanced Factspheres on its head and accurately pierced through the cockpits of four Britannian Sutherlands. Without knowing what had happened to their bodies, the pilots of the four Sutherlands had their flesh completely destroyed and they were instantly killed.

Following the Byakuen, Zi launched in his personal Knightmare as well. It was an old-type Glasgow that he had gotten through the black market, but it was a custom model that had been given a radical tune up according to Zi's preferences. Its weapon was a 25mm electromagnetic accelerator-type double antiaircraft

gun. Its power was inferior to the power of Byakuen's 30mm, but with a rapid fire rate of over 2000 rounds per minute that disregards the lifespan of the gun barrel, it blew away the approaching enemies literal side blows.

"Ganabati, get the truck out of here!"

The trailer rushed out of the town. Orpheus changed his gun's shell to a 49mm grenade and destroyed a building on the roadside in order to block the pursuers' path.

"Make it look like an accident, huh. That was some diversionary tactic."

Ganabati raised his voice to speak with a pleasant-sounding laugh.

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Just when the three of them started to think that they succeeded in losing their pursuers, a swallow-like shadow appeared in their path.

It was a light crimson Knightmare that possessed a silhouette clearly different from the other Britannian frames. It even had an ominous elegance that hung in the air from the cape fitted onto both its shoulders. Orpheus had only laid eyes on a frame similar to this in a data file he had seen once. The Knightmare that it was rumoured that the Britannian army was using in Area 11 in far east Asia, the Lancelot. This Knightmare was likely a derivative frame of the same type as that one.

This guy!

Orpheus had an instinctive hunch. The uneasy feeling that he had felt in Béjaïa was being emitted from this frame. It was possible to read writing on an emblem stenciled onto the crimson frame that

seemed to be its squad emblem, which read as “Glinda Knights”. Orpheus had noticed that the Sutherland that first appeared in Béjaïa had also worn the same squad emblem.

The Glinda Knights’ Knightmare opened its cape.

“What the heck are those!?”

It wasn’t unreasonable for Zi to cry out unconsciously like that. Twelve swords had appeared from within its cape. Then, it took a fighting stance with two unsheathed swords in both hands and advanced forward.

Orpheus held back Zi and went out with the Byakuen. His instincts told him that only he could be this person’s opponent. He unfolded his right arm’s electromagnetic cannon. He fired a 30mm armor piercing bullet. However, the enemy skillfully manipulated its legs’ Landspinners and continued advancing while avoiding the bullet’s path. This wasn’t average Knightmare piloting skill.

The Byakuen folded up its gun. At that instant, the enemy’s slash came. The Byakuen caught it with its right arm. Sparks flew brilliantly.

“Orpheus!” Zi cried out.

As good as the Byakuen was, he couldn’t safely feel at ease if he directly received a slash like that. But…

Having stored away and replaced electromagnetic cannon, the Byakuen had drawn out an atypical blade and had stopped the enemy’s sword with it.

“Zi! Return the Glasgow to the trailer.”

The enemy was equal to Orpheus in both skill and the performance of its Knightmare. Moreover, it was clear that the enemy’s goal was to keep Orpheus and the others here. If the fight was dragged on, reinforcements would arrive and escape would become difficult.

"Ganabati! I'm using that. Switch over to the back-up power."

Orpheus reversed towards the trailer and faced towards the enemy. Perhaps sensing something from that stance, the crimson Knightmare got a suitable distance away.

"Gefjun charge complete, safety released. Reaching diffusion radiation wave critical point—Gefjun Breaker, activate!"

An impulse of elementary particles gushed out from the Byakuen. It interfered with Sakuradite on the quantum level, and stopped the movement of Energy Fillers. The Glinda Knight Knightmare lost the power to move and stalled in place on its knees. Of course, the Byakuen was the same as well.

Orpheus opened the cockpit and stood on top of the Byakuen. The enemy Knightmare's pilot also came out at the same time. Orpheus strained his eyes to stare.

"...A woman, huh."

She seemed to be about the same age as him. Of course, a female knight wasn't strange. However...

"—Impossible!"

He unintentionally let his voice leak out.

The girl standing on top of the crimson Knightmare had the exact same face as Orpheus. It was like looking into a mirror. The girl was also openly shocked and glared at Orpheus.

"Who...are you?"

The words, spoken at the same time by the boy and girl that had the same face, flowed into the wind.

Chapter 2

Far Shooting

The “magician” who controls the two Ozs.
“The time has not yet come for the two of you to fight,” the masked man declares.
Guided by his words, Orpheus turns his back on his own past and heads for the next battlefield.
His mission: infiltrate the Britannian homeland and snipe a high-altitude bomber currently under development from an extreme distance.
The electromagnetic accelerator cannon of the Byakuen bares its fangs.

Chapter 2: Far Shooting

"Who…are you?"

Those words flowed into the dusk evening. The girl's voice, which had a much higher tone than his, seemed to overlap and speak in unison with his voice. This stimulated the deepest recesses of Orpheus' mind, and a distant memory was stirred.

"You're—"

Without even being conscious of it, Orpheus' mouth tried to issue the name of the girl, when—a flash occurred on the horizon far away. Slightly delayed, the sound of an explosion and the shock wave arrived and seized them.

"!"

Orpheus came back to his sense. The explosion just now was at the goods stockpile at Béjaïa.

"You bastard!"

The girl seemed to snap and rushed over towards him. Her expression of fury and the sword she held in her hand demonstrated that she had realized the truth of the explosion at Béjaïa. Orpheus also reflexively prepared to use the knife he had on him. But, before their blades could cross, a black silhouette gently alighted down between them.

"This isn't the time for you two to fight. Put away your blades, you two Oz's."

The black silhouette was an unfamiliar-looking Knightmare. It seemed to be a one-off custom frame. A man had appeared from the cockpit and gave that order to Orpheus and the girl. His face was hidden by a mask, and it wasn't possible to see his expression.

Two Oz's, he said?

"Go, Orpheus Zevon. The Britannian pursuit forces will arrive here at any moment."

While the masked man restrained the girl, Orpheus housed the Byakuen in the trailer and retreated from there. The masked also seemed to follow suit afterwards and disappeared. The girl was left alone in the dessert.

"Two Oz's..."

The masked man had certainly said that. Then, that girl with the same face as him—was she also called Oz? However, no one answered his question.

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Miss X, their contact, was waiting for Orpheus and the others, who had succeeded in returning alive from Béjaïa. Having a new mission offer for them, she visited the private military consultant organization's Peace Mark's home base.

"I want you to eliminate Britannia's new-model bomber."

The Britannian Air Force was going to roll out the prototype of a super-long-distance and high-altitude bomber equipped with the state-of-the-art Float System. If this bomber was deployed in actual combat, Britannia would obtain the means to inflict damage to every base on the earth without resupply.

"The client may be the E.U., or the Chinese Federation..."

"Or maybe a rival manufacturer that lost in the bidding war with the military?"

"That information wasn't inquired into. Whichever it is, it's possible to rewind Britannia's world conquest schedule a little by preventing the development of this bomber. That's important, you know?"

According to Miss X's explanation, the aircraft manufacturer in charge of its development had completed the prototype's assembly work at a location belonging to them around Lake Michigan within the Britannian continent, and planned to do a manned test flight soon at an adjoining airfield.

"By Lake Michigan, you mean in the middle of Britannia?"

"Yes. In Britannia's largest industrial area."

"It's because a large quantity of fresh water is needed for the production of advanced technology. That area is full of various big and small factories that mixes munitions and private demand."

"How are we supposed to slip into a place like that?"

"Leave that to me. I'll prepare the arrangements for that."

Listening to the silent conversation between Zi and the others, Orpheus quietly opened his mouth to speak.

"We'll take the request. We'll come up with a strategy soon. But before that, Miss X. There's something I'd like to confirm with you," said Orpheus.

"What is it? There's something you want to ask me?"

"...At Béjaïa, there was a girl who was identical to me. She was a Britannian knight."

"Eh? You mean..."

"Yes. It was without a doubt Oldrin Zevon."

"Your twin sister...So she's in the Britannia military..."

"The masked man also called her Oz."

"Masked man?"

Orpheus explained to Miss X what happened at Béjaïa from start to finish.

"The sister that I was separated from all my life, and a masked man…" Orpheus faintly smiled. "All sorts of people have appeared, you know? Do you have some knowledge about it?"

"For Oldrin's case, there's too little research on the matter. I'll investigate it. As for the masked man, I have a rough idea of who he is…Most likely, he's Wizard."

"Wizard?"

Miss X told Orpheus about the self-named "magician" masked man that was a supporter of Peace Mark.

"However, the only things that are known about him are that his codename is Wizard, that he possesses abundant information and assets, and that he pilots his own personal Knightmare as well."

"How shady. I don't agree with guys like him who watch things from the shadows."

"Yeah. However, he's a reliable existence. Also, he seems to be well-acquainted with your past as well."

"That just makes him all the more dislikable."

"True."

Miss X shrugged her shoulders.

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South Haven, the industrial town that was situated next to Lake Michigan while commanding a view of the state capital of Chicago on the opposite shore. In a particular section within it that was firmly guarded by the Britannia military was the R.A.O.'s—Royal

Aeronautical Ordinance—airplane manufacturing facility. Most of those huge grounds were comprised of a test flight-use airfield. The Britannian military's new-model bomber would take off from this airfield and undergo various tests. The security checks on people going in and out of the facility were ranked among the highest and it would be difficult even for Orpheus with his Geass to penetrate within it. Even if he did succeed in getting in, he couldn't expect to be able to accomplish the mission and escape afterwards. However, Peace Mark didn't undertake plans with the resolution of suicide like that.

"There's no need to approach the target. With the Byakuen, it's possible to aim and shoot at it from outside the guard zone."

That was the conclusion that Orpheus and the others came to. Of course, doing that wouldn't be easy.

On this site where the R.A.O.'s factory and airfield were adjacent to each other, the bomber could immediately go to the taxi way when it was rolled-out of the factory. According to nature of the plan, firing at the bomber just after takeoff was the most desirable course of action. This was because Britannia would suspect machine trouble at first if an accident occurred with this timing, which would hopefully give Orpheus enough time to escape.

A plan that couldn't be accomplished without the Byakuen—that is, an ultra-long distance shot using the ultra-high output electromagnetic accelerator cannon equipped to its right arm. Certainly, with the specs of this cannon, it is perfectly possible for target to receive the cannon shell. However, "receiving the bullet" and "hitting the mark" are too entirely different things.

Seen from the spot where Orpheus will fire from, the R.A.O.'s airfield is located on the other side of the horizon—in other words, somewhere that can't be directly seen without obstruction. Of

course, this is natural in a normal firefight. Primarily, field guns are weapons that are meant to hit targets at a distance of 10 km, 20 km, or even further away. However, in this mission, Orpheus would be facing a moving target, and would have to aim with pinpoint accuracy. For the sake of that, Orpheus had stationed Zi at a location where it was just barely possible for him to survey the target as an observer. But this wasn't to observe the bullet impact on the target. If it was a normal bullet shell, it was possible to correct the targeting alignment using the first bullet, but this was a one-shot deal this time. Therefore, Zi's job was to get as physically close to the target as possible, and to provide data on the various factors of the bomber as it moved down the runway and on the surrounding physical environment.

It could only be called an unfortunate coincidence that two Security Guard Knightmares showed up at the empty hill where Orpheus was concealing himself. For the South Haven police forces to lose their way because of land navigation trouble while doing practical Knightmare training was outside of his expectations. Moreover, it could be argued that an encounter with these Security Guards was more troublesome than meeting the Britannian regular army. Although the weapons equipped to the police-use Knightmares had their power relatively restrained and their armor was light, they on the other hand had stronger than average communications functions with their disposition towards public order. If his presence here was reported, everything would come to nothing.

The Byakuen pushed aside its camouflage netting and switched his right arm's weapon from the electromagnetic cannon to the blade. Attacking the Security Guards when they were unguarded and giving no time for them to react, Orpheus drove the

blade into the chest of one of them. The carefully calculated jab—the blow that severed the part that held the important wiring that controlled the functions of the Knightmare, which was equivalent to the human spinal cord, made all its circuits, including the emergency pilot ejection system, go silent in an instant. With this, it became impossible for the pilot to escape from his machine and call for help.

The Byakuen turned its attention to the second Security Guard. The pilot was desperately shouting into his communications device into order to communicate this emergency situation to the outside, but the Byakuen's enhanced-type Factspheres applied jamming interference and prevented that. However, this communication jamming would in itself call attention from the surrounding area. Orpheus couldn't afford to waste time here.

The Security Guard tried to block the Byakuen's attack with its shield. The Byakuen didn't commit the foolishness of piercing its armor with its blade. It moved its Landspinners and rammed into shield with its shoulder. The Security Guard thrusted away its shield from the impact, and its posture was greatly destroyed as a result. The upper armor section of the defenseless cockpit was wide open. The Byakuen pierce its blade through that thin armor.

"Oz. The target is moving."

The Byakuen received the communication from Zi, and then entered its bombardment set-up.

The bomber had begun gliding on the runway in order to take-off. Its course and velocity. The wind speed and direction of the surrounding area. Those, along with the correction of the Coriolis deviation effect from the Earth's rotation and the influence of geomagnetism, all naturally had an influence on the bullet's

trajectory. Not to mention atmospheric pressure, temperature and humidity level as well.

In order to maintain the gun barrel's angle of elevation, the Byakuen opened its feet wide in front and behind itself. A small tremor of the feet could also cause a great calculation error in hitting the far off impact point. The several voltage stabilization circuits that had been specifically expanded for the sake of this operation perfectly restrained the output fluctuation of the electromagnetic cannon.

"This is—my fang."

Whispering that, Orpheus quietly pulled the trigger. The high-pitched roar of the cannon resounded, and a precision bombardment-use special bullet was fired at supersonic speed towards the far off target. Orpheus could vividly imagine the form of the bullet plunging forward towards the target which he himself couldn't see. The bullet would run up to the sky above, and drawn a parabola with its path and then fall downwards. In its path should be Britannia's bomber. That huge mechanical bird, without realizing the destruction that was approaching from above, would have succeeded in its takeoff by now. As he transferred from gliding to ascending, a smile of relief would appear on the pilot's face—at that moment, the 72mm Sakuradite explosion shell landed.

Even before he heard the report from Zi, Orpheus believed that the mission was completed.

Chapter 3
Byakuen VS Guren

Chapter 3: Byakuen vs. Guren

Chinese Federation, Hong Kong. Occupying the east of the Pearl River Delta which lies at the mouth of the Pearl River of China, this city has developed as an important point of traffic in the Far East since ancient times. The numerous high-rise buildings there, which stand close together on land that has never said to have been spacious, are the Far East base of financial circulation. It could be said that, after Japan became the Britannia territory of Area 11, this city's importance increased in turn.

Britannia had borrowed a piece of land in Hong Kong facing the sea from the Chinese Federation as leased land, and created a harbor facility there known as the Far East Exchange Center. On the standpoint of the mutual non-aggression treaty both countries had entered, it officially took the outward appearance of a private economic organization branch office, but it is an open secret that this was merely an alias for the Britannian army's front-line base.

Ninety percent of the workers at the Far East Exchange Center, where the sovereignty of the Chinese Federation doesn't apply, are Britannian soldiers, and it was obvious to anyone's eyes that the ships registered as transport ships and moored at an exclusive harbor are full-fledged battleships of the Britannian Navy.

On a hill overlooking the base below, the mercenary group Peace Mark's Oz—Orpheus Zevon lay hidden. The mission this time was to attack this base, and retrieve or if necessary destroy a new model Knightmare captured by Britannia.

"As usual, you've brought us a terrible offer, girl."

"!..."

At Ganabati's words, Miss X's expression twisted ever so slightly. She knew quite well that he had purposely referred to her in that way that she hated. She had no intention of rising to his provocation.

"Isn't it because it's a terrible offer that it's being entrusted to us? Isn't that right, Mr. Client?" Zi said.

The mission this time was unusual, as the client himself was present as well. The fact that Miss X herself had come to the mission site as head of communications for the mission was not only exceptional but downright impossible; however, for even the client, whose identity was normally concealed, to be present was the exception among exceptions. This was because the client wished to explain the contents of the mission directly to Orpheus and the others. At the same time, he also talked about the urgency of this mission.

"Please forgive me for not giving my name."

The young man, a leader of a rebel group in the Chinese Federation, apologized. At first glance, he seemed Caucasian, but looking closely he appeared to have Asian ancestry mixed in. His

peculiarly bright red hair was tied up with a bandana and he had a rough appearance, but his well-bred background couldn't be hidden from the way he carried himself.

"It happened 48 hours ago. A Knightmare that should have been delivered to us from India was stolen by the Britannian army."

According to the young man's explanation, the Knightmare that had been stolen was called the "Guren Type-01", which his group had purchased from an arms dealer. Its successor unit, the Type-02, was known to have been used by the local resistance group in Area 11, the Black Knights, and to have given great gains and results in battle. This series excelled in mobility and could also fight equally with the Britannian army's Z-01 Lancelot. That was the kind of Knightmare that had fallen into the hands of the Britannian army.

"That's really bad. Isn't that a machine that Britannia would desperately want for themselves?"

"Exactly."

At Ganabati's question, the young man nodded. Apparently, Britannia's technological development agency, Camelot, had already dispatched a force to Hong Kong in order to transfer the Knightmare to the homeland. Before that force arrived, they had to take back the Guren Type-01.

"Or if that's not possible, destroy it...huh" Orpheus spoke.

"At Camelot, they are ready and waiting for the arrival of the Guren Type-01. The man in charge there, Lloyd, is quite good. If it falls into his hands, the advantages possesses by the Guren Series will be quickly lost. If that happens, then in Japan..."

At that point, the young man held his tongue. There seemed to be circumstances that prevented him from saying anything further on that. Miss X then asked Orpheus and the others a question.

"The Britannian Hong Kong Base has been entrusted to the Fifth Princess Carine. What do you know about her?"

"I've heard that she's a completely selfish and arrogant girl."

"That's a spot-on assessment. I think that Carine will try to get as much analysis data on the Guren Type-01 herself before the arrival of Camelot's transport force. She'll try to stand in predominance as much as she can among her siblings who possess the right to the throne."

"I see. This really is a bad situation."

"I beg you. Please take back the Guren Type-01. And if that can't be done, please destroy it. As you see fit."

The young requesting the mission said this and bowed his head. That action was very similar to the Japanese gesture known as bowing.

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While checking the reconnaissance data on the Britannian base, Orpheus opened a comm. line to Zi who was standing-by for assistance.

"Zi, can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes, loud and clear!"

"The guys at the Britannian base don't seem to have any intention to bring the target outside until the transport force arrives."

"Really? That's not good."

"I'll have to march in from here and drag it out."

"If you do that, won't recapturing it be difficult?"

"That's true. We'll have to destroy it, then."

On the other side of the radio, Zi's voice indicated that he was smiling slightly.

"As I thought…That's Oz's preferred method, after all."

"Yeah."

Orpheus launched in the Byakuen.

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"Listen well, Dasko! The followers of that hateful Lloyd will be here soon. Before we hand it over to them, make sure to examine every nook and cranny of that Knightmare's abilities. Understood!?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

To the girl's words that resounded from the intercom, Dasko responded with a voice that had none of his feelings in it. Of course, as a loyal knight, Dasko wouldn't raise an objection towards the orders of the Fifth Princess of the Britannian royal family, Carine ne Britannia, even if it was unreasonable. On the contrary, today he was even listening with joy to the unreasonable demands dispatched by this selfish princess. As a member of the knights who piloted Knightmares even a little, how he could not be thrilled at being blessed with the chance to pilot an unknown Knightmare—and what's more, one of the infamous Guren Series.

"Dasko la Clermont, launching in the Guren Type-01."

Through the Factspheres, environmental information on the vast indoor practice grounds flowed in. In this town area constructed for mock battles, a group of Glasgows linked to a weapons-performance-assessment system had deployed and were

attacking the Guren Type-01 using various tactics. As he opposed them, Dasko displayed the abilities of the Guren Type-01 to its limits and recorded the data on it. The permitted time for this was about several hours, until the transport force from Camelot arrived. But even with only that much time, it should be possible for his lady Carine to lead predominantly in the expected dispute over the rights to the imperial successions in the future, which was also tied to Dasko's own success in life, by collecting sufficient data.

Dasko advanced towards the mock-town area in the Guren Type-01. His weapons consisted of a single EM Lance—an electromagnetic lance. In order to know this frame's true ability, they didn't go as far as to equip it with any firearms. It was difficult to control the damage given to Glasgows piloted by friendly forces when using a rifle or heavy artillery. On that point, it was possible for him to disable the other Knightmares without harming the pilots when using the EM Lance that he was accustomed to. Dasko was a man of the lance. His ability with it was great enough that he had competed once or twice among the Britannian knights.

At the same time as he entered the town, three Glasgows hiding behind the shadows of buildings shot at him. The bullets that came flying at him were practice-use polymer bullets, which he dodged with some simple footwork. Mentally, Dask clicked his tongue and tut-tutted at them. The Glasgows' shooting was accurate, but there was no element of surprise. The Guren Type-01 kicked off a wall and jump through midair in a drawling-like low trajectory. He lunged with the excited state-activated EM Lance, and sent a thrust through the Glasgow on the right. Then, he rotated his left arm at a 90 degrees rotation along his torso as an axis. Charging at the center Glasgow from the side, this time he chose to twist his arm hard back around and collided it with the

arm of the Glasgow, thereby plucking off its wrist along with its rifle. The Glasgow's finger was warped by the impact and was stuck in a state where it was pulling the trigger. He pointed the gun muzzle at the Glasgow on the left. The 32.5mm practice bullets hit the Glasgow's Factsphere and downed the delicate sensor mechanism.

The Guren Type-01 had done this series of movements in a flowing-like and unfaltering fashion. What mobility. What maneuvering ability.

This Knightmare…I can use it!

As Dasko snickered, a segment of the roof that covered the practice grounds suddenly rained down from overhead along with a thunderous roar. At the same time, a white silhouette landed before him. It was a Knightmare. But, it wasn't a model that Dasko had ever seen before. Perhaps rom the Chinese Federation or E.U.—no, this was different than their models. The Knightmare raised its right arm and pointed it at him. The next instant, there was a flash as a shot was fired from its right arm.

"!…"

For an instant, Orpheus couldn't believe his eyes. The first shot had been fired from only 30 meters away from the target. It was literally a certain one-shot kill. But the Guren Type-01 had narrowly avoided it.

Fast. Even among the Knightmares he had fought against up until now, its maneuverability was top-class. So this was the machine whose performance Britannia felt that they just had to investigate.

Is it the machine's ability? Or is it the pilot's skill?

Orpheus quickly loaded a second bullet. The shell was the same APDS-type as the first. But, just as he fired, the enemy jumped to the right with an amazingly quick movement. The shell pierce through a wall of lifeless reinforced concrete in the back and knocked down an empty building. Orpheus thought to himself, "This will be a troublesome battle."

"Princess, please run away!" Dasko shouted.

But, Carine, who was encamped at the platform from where the town area could be looked at from above, showed no signs of moving.

"I refuse! If you are a proud knight of the Fifth Princess Carine ne Britannia, show it and splendidly cut off this ruffian's head. I won't accept it if you make your mistress lose face."

She declared it haughtily. It seemed that, in her mind, the victory of her retainer was an established fact. But, it could be said that those words were the best encouragement for Dasko.

"Yes, Your Highness!"

Dasko raised his voice in sincere delight. This was a true battle. The ideal chance to collect the utmost data that couldn't be obtained in practice.

While using the group of buildings within the practice-use town as a shield, the Guren Type-01 skillfully shortened the distance between itself and the Byakuen. Obviously, it did this in order to utilize its close-combat weapon, the EM Lance. This point could be said to be more advantageous for the Byakuen, which was equipped with long-range artillery.

However...

That's the enemy's aim.

Even if he rushed victory and relied just on artillery, based on the maneuvering ability of the Guren Type-01 that he'd seen, it was clear that he couldn't hit it so easily. In this situation where the time and place were on the side of the Guren Type-01, there was little merit in sticking to long-range bombardment.

"In that case…!"

He would take the opponent's invitation. Orpheus stored the cannon back in the Integrated Armament and replaced it by unfolding his blade and firing his Slash Harken, thereby instantly shortening the distance between himself and the enemy.

So stubborn…!

As he watched the Byakuen switch its weapons, Dasko growled. He didn't know who the pilot was, but his resolution to give up the use of firearms deserved praise. This enemy truly was a worthy opponent.

The EM Lance and blade hit each other with a loud clang and scattered bright sparks in the air. They then changed from a moment of silence to movement. The Guren Type-01 sunk its back and forcibly pushed the tip of the lance forward. It seemed like a careless movement, but it was an invitation. But the Byakuen's movements betrayed Dasko's predictions. It moved forward while sliding its blade along the surface of the lance. Without minding the sword was being melted by the electromagnetic emissions of the lance, it shortened the distance between itself and the Guren Type-01. The meaning of that movement was…

"Tch!"

Dasko threw his lance forward. The Byakuen's aim was a point-blank gunshot!

Gotcha!

Orpheus unfolded his gun barrel just as he purged the sword that was now useless, and pulled the trigger. At that instant, the EM Lance burst through the gun barrel from the front and crashed into the bullet that had begun to accelerate. Due to the explosion that then occurred inside the gun barrel, the EM Lance lost its tip and sustained heavy damage. On the other hand, the Byakuen had also lost its cannon and had sustained great damage on its right arm. However, it still had another weapon it could use—its drill. The drill unfolded from the damaged Integrated Armament and the Byakuen activated its Landspinners. With the entire kinetic energy of the charging Byakuen in it, the drill pierced through the body of the Guren Type-01. Orpheus was aiming for the Energy Filler. If the energy of the Sakuradite that was stored within was all suddenly released, the Guren Type-01 would be completely destroyed.

"Eat this—my fang!" Orpheus roared that out.

"I won't let you!"

Dasko caught the Byakuen with the Guren Type-01's arms and locked their joints. If he was going to die, the enemy would be coming with him.

Just as the drill pierced through the armor of the Type-01, Orpheus realized Dasko's intention. The Byakuen had been restrained by the Guren Type-01, and their mechanical bodies were glued together. If the Guren Type-01 blew up while like this…

"Dasko!"

"Princess!?"

Dasko became shocked. Behind the Guren Type-01, Carine came into view standing on the platform. If the Guren blew up, she wouldn't be safe either. There was no room for choice. Dasko pulled the cockpit's emergency ejection lever. The cockpit ejected as if it

were being shot out. It landed on the platform like that, and then Dasko picked up Carine and rolled into a covered trench.

As the Guren Type-01 lost control, its arms also lost their gripping strength.

"!"

Orpheus purged the Byakuen's right arm while the drill was still deployed. He then reversed his Landspinners and retreated at full power.

At the same time, an explosion occurred in the Guren Type-01's Energy Filler. Following the pale flash that was characteristic of a Sakuradite explosion, a shock wave spread out beyond the speed of sound, and the Guren Type-01 was changed into a red-hot fireball and consumed everything.

Chapter 4

A Town Not On The Map

Chapter 4: A Town Not On The Map

That day, Orpheus Zevon was in a small desolated and ruined town. A frontier village that was far away from any urban areas and that you could only arrive at by going down a rugged and weaving mountain path. It was surrounded on all sides by a thick forest, and there were almost no cases of outsiders visiting this place.

"I've returned, Euliya."

Orpheus offered a small bouquet of flowers at the cornerstone of a burnt house dirtied with soot. Everything was covered with weeds, but looking closely all the surrounding buildings were also burnt down. In the not so far past, this village had been wrapped in flames. It was then that the happiest time of Orpheus's life were taken away.

Several days earlier…

"Hungary?"

"That's right. I'm meeting with Wizard there."

Orpheus said that and pointed at a map. Southern Hungary, a mountainous region near the border. The meeting place was a location that wasn't recorded on the map at all. The fact that the conditions for meeting with someone were being suggested by Orpheus was unusual.

"There's nothing at that place, isn't there?"

"There used to be a village there in the past."

"Certainly, I'm grateful to him for lending us a replacement Knightmare until the repairs to the Byakuen are complete, but…"

That had been the proposal of Peace Mark's big sponsor, Wizard. He said that he would lend them a high-spec custom Glasgow for Orpheus to pilot until the Byakuen, which received great damage in the battle against the Guren Type-02 at Hong Kong, was repaired.

"Leaving aside the Glasgow itself, why do you have to go to Hungary to receive it?"

"It's a personal matter. I have no intention of explaining."

Zi frowned.

"Really? We're also going have to do various things, like transporting the frame and performing countermeasures against Britannian inspection, you know."

"Leave it at that, Zi. If Oz says he won't explain, that's the end of the matter."

So said Ganabati.

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In Orpheus' mind, there was always the smiling face of one girl: Euliya, the only other person that Orpheus had ever trusted. Because her existence was the only thing that had made it possible for him to endure those days of hell spent showing results in his power at the Geass Order.

In the Order, led by the mysterious boy called V.V., Orpheus had developed and trained his Geass power of taking the appearance of other people. However, refusing to be used by the Order as a Geass user, he had plotted to escape along with Euliya.

Running from the pursuit of the Order, the place the two of them stayed at was a small village in southern Hungary. How did the forms of these two young people look in the eyes of the villagers—the two of them didn't tell them everything, but the villagers had said nothing and accepted both of them. Orpheus mixed with the village men and helped with all the work, from farming to cattle-breeding. Euliya, who learned how to cook and sew from the women, also helped with making traditionally-crafted embroidery, and brought a modest income to the village through it. They were poor, but to the two of them, it was without a doubt a happy time.

Until that night—when his uncle Oiagro Zevon and his four subordinates came.

It was something he only learned later after he become a member of Peace Mark, but Oiagro and the subordinates he commanded were part of a dark group with a long history called "Pluton". That group's objective was to single-handedly undertake every single dirty job for the Britannian royal family. And the clan that led Pluton was the very Zevon family that Orpheus was born

into. Following the custom of the Zevon family, when twins are born, the male twin is sent out to be adopted elsewhere. Orpheus, who didn't know a thing about his birth as a result of that, had no choice but to call it ironic that he met his uncle Oiagro. Because Oiagro came to this village in order to erase Orpheus and Euliya who had fled from the Order.

Through Emperor Charles, V.V. had handed down search-and-kill orders regarding Orpheus and Euliya to Pluton. Oiagro and his four subordinates attacked the village with Knightmares, killed all the villagers and set everything on fire. Also ironically, the only one that managed to survive was Orpheus. Euliya had protected Orpheus and breathed her last breath in his arms.

Learning of the origins of his birth and his blood connection to Oiagro who attacked the village, Orpheus swore revenge against all those who had to do with Euliya's death. And in order to engrave that decision in his heart, he went as far as to take upon himself the surname of Zevon, which he should have hated. If he rebelled against Britannia and flung himself to the frontlines of battle as a mercenary hired for money, it would definitely be possible to come across Oiagro and his four subordinates. Believing that, Orpheus remained in Peace Mark. It was only for the sake of revenge against Pluton that Orpheus continued living.

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A faint mechanical sound drifted through. Orpheus stood up and turned his head in the direction the noise was coming from. His

consciousness clicked and switched over to battle-mode. He strained his ears. The driving sound of a Knightmare was approaching. Was it the Glasgow that Wizard had prepared? Orpheus began to lower his guard back down, but…

"!"

No. This wasn't the driving sound of a Glasgow. It was the driving sound of a Sutherland—and moreover, the unique driving sound of a custom Sutherland that clung to Orpheus' ears and that he could never forget in his life. A Pluton Knightmare that had once attacked this village. It had appeared once again.

Orpheus ran. The enemy he had been searching for—But, he would never have thought that he would encounter them with this kind of timing.

Was I being watched? Had they already even learned that the Byakuen had received damage in Hong Kong? To begin with, did the enemy know that I'm a member of Peace Mark? No, that may be thinking too much. Really, it was impossible tell whether the enemy might have merely come here by terrible coincidence, or with Orpheus as their aim. Various questions coursed through his mind, but Orpheus made himself ignore them.

This situation was bad. For the time being, he had to get some distance away from the enemy and get in touch with Zi and Ganabati, and…

The sound of an explosion roared. The car that Orpheus had taken to get here was going up in flames. The vivid flames scorched the evening sky.

"!"

Dropping his waist, he changed directions and ran while weaving between shrub bushes. The Sutherland had fired at his car with its Assault Rifle. With this, things were clear. The enemy was

aiming for him. He would find it out later, but the truth was that Orpheus's movements had been marked by Pluton since he entered Hungary. The dark organization that undertook Britannia's dirty jobs never forgot about a target they had failed to shoot…

A bullet from the Assault Rifle landed nearby, raising up a cloud of dust. The enemy was shooting at Orpheus using the infrared images obtained through their Factsphere. Pebbles that were sent flying from the impact poured down on his head, and the stones of rubble that was blown off buildings hit his body hard. But Orpheus ignored that pain and ran. The pain from his body was insignificant compared to the anguish of losing Euliya. While keeping the adrenaline coursing through his body, Orpheus calmly considered the weapons he had on hand.

It's useless. I only have a military-use handgun and knife for self-defence. They couldn't possible help against an opponent in a Knightmare.

At that moment, as Orpheus broke through a cluster of trees, the Sutherland appeared before his eyes. It was a frame he recognized. One of the Pluton frames that had once reduced this village to ashes. The eerie emblem that was stencilled onto its armor was something he never forgot even for a day.

He could feel unmistakable killing intent being emitted through the Factsphere. *Right now at this moment, I'm this guy's prey.*

The Sutherland prepared its rifle. Orpheus looked straight into that empty gun barrel. A Knightmare-use 20mm Assault Rifle. If hit directly by that bullet propelled at super-sonic speeds, his body would be smashed into small fragments. He wouldn't even feel the pain…

If that happens, I can meet Euliya again.

The dark temptation of death. But, at the same time, a gentle voice resounded within his mind. It was…

Orpheus… Please, live.

The words Euliya had let out in her last moments. The wish of a girl that risked her life, only wanting for the one she loved, Orpheus, to live.

"…Euliya!!"

At the same time as he cried her name out, Orpheus jumped to the side and dodged the Sutherland's shot.

I can't die yet. But, how can I break through this situation?

At that instant, a shell exploded in the Sutherland's hands. The mechanism of the Assault Rifle was destroyed, and the gushing-out energy of Sakuradite illuminated the vicinity like a strobe light. Orpheus reflexively looked away to protect his eyesight, and then looked up to the sky above. A black, atypical humanoid form—a Knightmare. It seemed to be holding and suspending another different frame in the air.

"Agravain—So it's you, Wizard!"

"Use this, Oz."

At the same time as its pilot said that, the Agravain let loose the suspended frame—a Glasgow. Landing using its automatic landing controls, the Glasgow's cockpit opened and invited Orpheus in.

"…Thanks!"

Orpheus quickly started up the Glasgow. By just lightly testing out the response of the operating system, he quickly understood it. This frame was good. Everything was splendidly adjusted—no, tuned to Orpheus' habits. From the instant he got on it, he could pilot it like the Byakuen.

Orpheus quickly confirmed the situation. After delivering the Glasgow, Wizard's Agravain seem to have retreated. It appeared it he had no intention to further participate in the battle. Well, that was also fine. Supplying the Glasgow to Orpheus was all the support he needed. Meanwhile, having lost its rifle, the Sutherland had taken out a silver EM Lance.

Orpheus activated the Glasgow's weapons system and chose the Assault Rifle. He rapid-fired with the 20mm bullets. The Sutherland avoided the firing lines with its Landspinners, and reliably shortened the distance between itself and the Glasgow.

Strong. He must have been as accustomed, no, more accustomed to battle than Orpheus. In that case…

Orpheus aimed the rifle's sight not at the Sutherland, but at its feet and pulled the trigger. Rubble was sent flying and the field of vision was hidden. The cornerstone where Orpheus had offered flowers to Euliya was also smashed up. But, there was no hesitation in Orpheus.

Live.

Euliya had said that. And this was a battle in order to survive and live.

Catching the moment when the sight of the Sutherland was blocked, Orpheus threw away his rifle and activated his Mark-59 anti-armor Combat Knife. At the same time, he approached the Sutherland using his Landspinners. He avoided the tip of the lance and thrusted with the high frequency blade that vibrated very fast.

"Eat—my fang!"

The crystalline structure of the special allow that the Mark-59's blade was composed of, which ignored durability and poured in electric power, crumbled in just a few seconds, but just before that, it penetrated through the L307 reinforced Tungsten

bombproof metal sheet that was used as the armor material for Knightmares and boasted maximum strength, and reached the cockpit. The Sutherland's operations stopped. It had lost combat power.

Orpheus descended from the Glasgow and carefully approached the Sutherland. He opened the cockpit and pointed his handgun at the pilot. But, it wasn't necessary to pull the trigger. With one look, he knew the enemy was on the verge of death. The high frequency wave that was given off from the Glasgow's knife when it penetrated the cockpit had thoroughly burned through his body. The pilot was slowly but surely breathing his dying breath. The pain would continue until he died. Thinking that, Orpheus felt good.

"Speak. Where is Pluton's base? Where is Oiagro Zevon? If you tell me, I'll put you out of your misery now with this gun. Now, speak. Where is Oiagro Zevon!?"

The pilot spit out blood mixed with reddish-black bubbles.

"Plu…ton will…kill…you."

He looked up at Orpheus with no strength left in his eyes and bent his lips. He was smiling.

"…"

Orpheus left the pilot in the Sutherland and left that place. He wouldn't return to this village again.

There were still four people remaining that he had to carry out revenge against.

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The curtain of night had come down upon the ruined village.

From the cockpit of the stranded Sutherland, faint breathing and occasionally foaming sounds could be heard. The pilot still hadn't died.

A black shadow softly lightly stood over the cockpit. A man who hid his face with a mask—Wizard.

"Cerberus."

When Wizard muttered that, he crouched over the pilot and took off his mask. On the blood-stained face of the pilot called Cerberus, an expression of shock appeared. He moved his lips a little in order to say something. Wizard picked his body up in his arms, as if tending to him.

"Forgive me, my friend..."

Wizard's hand quickly flash, and Cerberus became quiet. A thin and sharp knife had pierced his neck and destroyed the lower half of his brain stem. Laying Cerberus' corpse back in the cockpit, Wizard stood up and got back down to the ground. If Orpheus had happened to be present there, what would he have said?

Because, when Cerberus saw Wizard's face without his mask, he called out a name:

"Oiagro—"

Chapter 5

The Streets of St. Peter

Chapter 5: The Streets of St. Peter

Out of all of the offers that Oz—Orpheus Zevon and the others in Peace Mark had received until now, this one could be called the strangest.

"Escort bodyguards for artwork?"

The usually reticent Orpheus unintentionally repeated back the words as a question.

His partner Zi Dien and the chief mechanic Ganabati also looked at Miss X, the intermediary for the client's offer, with bewildered expressions.

"Something like art isn't exactly up our alley. Right, old man?"

In response to Zi's words,

"Please speak for yourself. Even if I look like this, I'll have you know that I have great aesthetic taste."

Ganabati laughed, and then turned to look at Miss X's glamorous body with her elegant curves.

"The fee for appreciating looks is high, you know."

Ganabati pretended to look scared at Miss X's words with a theatrical gesture. Cutting off that flow of exchanges,

"According to rumour, there are specialized artwork-guarding teams within the mercenary world as well. So tell us why they haven't requested such specialists." Orpheus asked.

"The other party doesn't have the time to be picky about the team they request. Right now, the only ones that they can rely on are Peace Mark."

"Very well. We'll accept the offer."

"I thought you would say that. The mission reward will be three times the usual. Necessary expenses will be paid separately."

"Where is it?"

"St. Petersburg."

"...!"

Zi and Ganabati held their breath, speechless.

That was the name of the city that had been determined several days in advance would transform into a hellish battlefield.

Situated in western Russia, St. Petersburg—the largest metropolis in northern Europe. Its history was also surprisingly shallow, as it had first formed as a city in the 18th century. Possessing a harbour facing the Gulf of Finland that lead to the Baltic Sea, its value was immeasurable to the E.U. not only because of its importance in commerce trade, but also as a strategic military point. Of course, it was also the same for Britannia.

"If I remember right, isn't there an E.U. regiment that barricaded themselves in St. Petersburg and are deployed for a besieging battle against Britannia?" Zi said.

"Britannia is also preparing to attack with their current fighting strength… It wouldn't be strange if they were crushed quickly and pushed back."

It was just as Ganabati said. It was tactically common sense that the attacking side would need more than 3 times the fighting power of the defending side to suppress an enemy that had barricaded themselves. But…

"The Britannian forces surrounding St. Petersburg will begin an all-out attack soon. This is definite information from well-informed sources."

"If that's the case, the damage on both sides will be huge. Why does Britannia need to hurry that much to capture St. Petersburg?"

"You'll have to ask the Britannians that," Miss X answered bluntly.

"In any case, when this attack is put into effect, the streets of St. Petersburg will become a battlefield. If that happens, it will cause huge damage."

"…I see. The Hermitage, huh," Orpheus said.

The Hermitage referred to the Hermitage Art Museum in the center of St. Petersburg. Various artworks that were collected after the middle of the 18th century were kept in this art museum. Their value could certainly be called treasures of humanity.

"Da Vinci, Raphael, Velasquez, and Renoir…the names that could be mentioned are endless. Are you knowledgeable about paintings, Oz?"

"I'm not particularly interested. But, I do like Rembrandt. Have you seen 'The Return of the Prodigal Son'?"

While Zi and Ganabati thought it surprising to hear the name of a Dutch painter come out from Orpheus' mouth, Miss X who had originally asked was herself even more surprised.

"Rem…brandt?"

Orpheus faintly laughed at the confused Miss X.

The client this time was a secret organization of rich art lovers who established themselves beyond the barriers of state, race and principles for the sake of protecting artworks from the war. This organization was using its wealthy assets for the sake of collecting and safekeeping every single piece of artwork under the fear that they would disappear from war damage. For the sake of protecting the Hermitage art collection from the imminently approaching collision between the Britannian and E.U. armies here, this organization had been vigorously moving artwork here over the course of several weeks. But, it had become clear that Britannia's all-out attack was approaching sooner than they had expected. Because of that, the team that had been the last one to carry out the art collection had been left behind in St. Petersburg.

—We will rescue that team, and back them up in their escape to outside the city along with the art collection. Understood.

With that, the discussion was over.

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The repairs to Orpheus's Knightmare, the Byakuen, still had yet to be completed. Therefore, he would use the Glasgow that Wizard had given to him for this mission. The land route from Hungary where Orpheus was currently staying to St. Petersburg was by no means short. But, compared to disembarking at the strictly guarded waterfront district, the danger there seemed much lower. The reason the offer had been sent to Peace Mark was because of that

exact point. Moreover, if it was the Glasgow that was a commonplace model within the Britannia army (though this one's interior had been enhanced by Wizard), their passage would be easy even if they were questioned by an inspection. Thanks to that, Orpheus and the others were able to arrive behind the front lines of the Britannia army surrounding the city of St. Petersburg without significant trouble.

The late-night interior of the city had already transformed into a battlefield. Gunshots resounded through the streets they walked through, and the wreckage of destroyed Knightmares and armoured vehicles were turned over and burning everywhere. The sound of cannons that roared sporadically was for the sake of preventing the E.U. soldiers barricaded within the city from going to sleep.

Orpheus observed the movements of the Britannian army. The movements of the squadrons had become active. The amount of encrypted communications had also increased by leaps and bounds several hours after they arrived.

"I say, it feels like the Britannian attack will start soon. If it goes according to theory, the all-out attack will begin before dawn," Zi muttered.

The two of them approached the rear of the Britannian army's encirclement. The plot was that Zi was escorting a Glasgow piloted by a superior officer. Both of them were dressed in the uniforms of Britannian soldiers. By going in the darkness right before dawn while the smoke of gunpowder was still hanging in the air, the fact that they had stripped these uniforms off of soldiers they had killed who had been groping along within the dark wouldn't be easily noticed.

The Britannian army had deployed so as to surround the E.U. forces that had confined themselves within the city. When they finally arrived at the rear of their deployment, Orpheus got down from his Glasgow.

"What are you going to do?"

"Having only this Glasgow is insufficient fighting power. We need a Knightmare for you as well."

After saying that, Orpheus minutely observed the movements of the Britannian army. In front of him, there was a unit equipped with a fully-charged Energy Filler and a rifle. The knight that piloted it had just completed a roll call by his superior officer. Orpheus decided to obtain that frame. First, he burned into his eyes the appearance of the superior officer that was giving directions to his subordinate. He waited until the officer left, leaving the pilot alone, and then activated his Geass ability. Instantly, his appearance became the same as the Britannian Captain that had left just a moment ago.

"Follow me," he said.

Accompanied by Zi, Orpheus approached the pilot of the Sutherland. The pilot, upon seeing him, easily believed that the superior officer had returned for some business.

"What is it, Captain?"

"Sorry, there's a equipment change. You will be piloting a new model frame that has newly deployed."

"A new model!?"

The pilot smiled broadly. Piloting a new model frame meant a promotion as well. Orpheus ordered the pilot to hand over his Sutherland to Zi and to remain on standby here until the new model frame arrived, and then he and Zi left from there.

"Hey, Oz. Shouldn't we have disposed of that guy?"

"It's not a problem. It would be more of a problem if they found his body and it caused a scandal."

"...Guess so. Did you see how his face lit up when he heard about a new model? That knight is definitely heading to the disciplinary squad because of this."

Zi laughed in amusement.

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Orpheus and Zi succeeded in penetrating into the interior of the Britannian army's encirclement, under the pretext of conducting reconnaissance maneuvers before the full-scale offensive.

"We got into the city unexpectedly easily."

"Yeah. But getting out will be the hard part."

The two of them got down from their Knightmares and slowly approached the Hermitage Art Museum. Then, the stifled voice of a man came out from within the darkness.

"Stop."

The stinging air gave off a murderous intent. There were without a doubt several guns being aimed at them. Orpheus responded back calmly.

"This is the art museum, right? I heard they have Giorgione here."

Instantly, he heard the man's breath catch from the other side of the darkness.

"...Yeah. The Judith is magnificent no matter how many times one sees it."

"I prefer the Tempest. I discover something new no matter how many times I see it."

"...You guys are the people from Peace Mark?"

"That's right."

Suddenly, he felt the hostile atmosphere disappear from the surrounding presences. From out of the darkness, exhausted men carrying guns appeared.

"We intended to escape from St. Petersburg along with the last of the art pieces, but..."

The man who was introduced as the carry-out team's leader pointed towards a shock-proof container for the exclusive use of transporting artwork. Zi spoke in an amazed voice.

"Can't you leave it behind and just go?"

"Don't be stupid. As if we can endure losing artworks like these in times of war! They're humanity's treasure which can never be regained."

"Life can't be regained either, you know?"

"It's a cheap price if we can protect these works with our lives."

There was no hesitation in the man's words.

"I understand," said Orpheus. "Both you guys and the artwork, we'll help you all escape from this city. That is our mission."

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"Please change into these."

Orpheus gave Britannian military uniforms that he had been prepared to all the members of the carry-out team. He had gathered

them while coming here. Like this, the improvised Britannian Special Forces unit was completed. Once they finished that, the group went out from the north side of the Hermitage Art Museum, which was adjacent to the Neva River. They advanced cautiously while keeping the trailer carrying the container in the middle, Orpheus' Glasgow in front, and Zi's Sutherland in the back.

"Whatever happens, don't panic. Right now, we are a special forces unit of the Britannian army. All right?"

The group crossed over Dvortsoviy Bridge which spanned the Neva River and went across to Vasilyevsky Island on the opposite bank. Then they crossed through the Birzhevaya square, and as they approached near Birzhevoy Bridge, the leader of the carry-out team questioned Orpheus.

"Do you intend for us to cross the bridge?"

"No. We're not using a land route."

Their line of vehicles went west across Makarova Street while staying alongside to the northern coast, and headed towards the Tuchkov Bridge. Near the bridge, there was a pier where tourist ships were anchored. Orpheus' plan was to descend from there into the Neva River, head toward the Gulf of Finland, and then finally escape to the Baltic Sea.

"¡!"

In front of them, five Britannian Sutherland-class ships were approaching the group.

"Don't reduce speed. It's a Britannian patrol," Orpheus pointed out.

"Meeting a patrol at a place like this wasn't in the plan, right?"

"The schedule must have changed. You can direct your complaints to Britannia."

While gazing at the enemy with a calm expression, Orpheus undid the safety of his special drill which carried a chain-drive 4-barrel Gatling gun inside it. Jokingly called the "Mince Maker" by Zi, he said it was the most brutal close-range battle weapon.

"The trailer there, stop. We'll be inspecting the cargo."

The voice of a Britannian soldier resounded out from a speaker.

"What should we do, Oz?" the leader of the carry-out team asked.

"No problem."

Orpheus contacted Ganabati on the radio.

"Ganabati? Can you see us?"

"Yeah. You've gotten yourself into a troublesome situation, haven't you?"

Ganabati was approaching the pier of Tuchkov Bridge by barge. Orpheus changed the plan and issued directions to pass through to the pier as it was. Looking at the sky, the ground to the east was faintly but definitely being dyed dark red. Dawn was going to arrive soon. Orpheus ordered the line of vehicles behind him to slowly reduce speed.

"Are you serious? It'll be the end if we're inspected, you know!?"

"Don't shout. Soon, we'll commence Plan B."

"...Plan B?"

At that moment, a wind-cutting noise like a shrill scream was heard from above. Everyone there reflexively looked up at the sky—however, just one person, Orpheus, didn't.

"Zi! Drop the container into the river!"

At the same time as he shouted that order, he thrusted the Mince Maker through the Sutherland in front of him. At the same

time as the bits of special steel, which spun at a high velocity, penetrated the enemy's armor, he discharged the Gatling gun. As it tore through and shattered the internal mechanisms, both the unit and the pilot were reduced to wreckage in an instant. Meanwhile, the men of the carry-out team behind him screamed as Zi's Sutherland tossed the container carrying precious works of art into the river.

"What are you doing!?"

Tumbling out from the trailer, the leader ran up to the riverside with a face that had lost all color. Then…

"Perfect timing, right, boss?"

Ganabati stuck out his head from the pilothouse of the barge, whose deck was covered with a shock-absorbing material of expanding foam. The thrown container was wrapped around by the shock-absorbing material and was already being fixed in place.

Orpheus swung the Mince Maker horizontally and mowed down the enemy with machine gunfire. The Britannian patrol party, recovering from the shock of the surprise attack, at once prepared themselves to counterattack. It was at that moment that pillars of fire rose up behind them. The patrol was thrown into confusion by the unexpected events unfolding one after another: fire columns were rising up not only here, but also everywhere within the city. Someone had come flying from the sky above and was laying attacks on the Britannian army.

"Get on the boat quickly," Orpheus ordered the collection team.

Zi, covering the group with his Sutherland, shouted to Ganabati:

"Now!"

A particularly big column illuminated the early morning Neva River in red. The bombs that Ganabati had prepared beforehand on Dvortsoviy Bridge and Tuchkov Bridge exploded, and the bridges were knocked down into the river. As for the Britannian army who were moving on top of there…

After confirming that Zi had gotten out of his Sutherland and climbed onto the boat, Orpheus thrusted the Mince Maker into the last of the enemy Knightmares that was still resisting. As he closed the blades at the top while spinning the bits, pieces of metal that had torn apart with an uncanny breaking sound and pieces of crimson meat scattered across the surface of the ground.

Orpheus jumped onto the barge which was starting to go down the river with his Glasgow. It was necessary for him to remain on standby inside his frame until they escaped to the Baltic Sea.

"What's the situation?"

Activating his communications system, Orpheus asked that to Zi who was investigating the situation of their surroundings.

"It seems that Miss X's information that an E.U. special forces unit would be conducting a surprise attack was true. We were saved thanks to that."

"That's practically an act of suicide. According to a rumor I heard, they seem to be marching into there in order to save the stupid sons of some higher-ups, after all…"

Orpheus went back into his Glasgow's cockpit. They couldn't be negligent until they escaped to the Baltic Sea.

The streets of St. Peter that were spread out on both banks of the Neva River were wrapped in the continuous sounds of gunfire and explosions. The story of the group that swooped down on St. Petersburg on the morning of this day, the wZERO—the special forces unit called by the nickname of "Wyvern" and comprised of

Eleven boys and girls, was a story that Orpheus would only learn about much later.

Chapter 6

Each's Respective Darkness

Chapter 6: Each's Respective Darkness

Carine ne Britannia had many faults as a human being. For example, her greed, arrogance, and cruelty. And those faults were also at the same time the disposition that was indispensable to surviving as a princess who was in line to the throne in the royal court of Britannia, where trickery and intrigues whirled around. Among those necessary qualities she possessed, boldness was also included.

Carine was currently fully displaying that boldness. That was because the atmosphere that drifted from the man sitting before her was gloomy and sinister.

Oiagro Zevon. The current head of the Zevon family, a minor noble family in Britannia—however, that was only his public title. The Zevon family's true form was the shady-jobs organization Pluton—they were a clan that had, for generations, undertaken various dirty jobs that never appeared on the front stage of history for the sake of the Britannian Imperial Family. Assassinations,

kidnapping, blackmail. It was not an exaggeration to say that all of the past emperors of Britannia, without exception, gained their throne due to the blood-smeared hands of the Zevon family.

As Oiagro stared back at here with an expressionless face that did not reveal what he felt inside, Carine silently threw over a paper folder with various sheets of print-outs inserted inside it. He quickly looked over the contents.

"...Then, I'm to annihilate this organization?" Oiagro asked quietly.

"That's right. These guys oppose His Majesty the Emperor, and have repeatedly performed terrorist activities. Crushing this organization is directly connected to Britannia's interests in the southeast Asia region."

The folder that Carine had given to Oiagro was an investigation report about the details of a certain anti-Britannia militant group. Inside it, it showed that the base of this organization was established within a jungle. If it become known that Carine had annihilated this organization, Carine's presence in the royal court would surely increase by leaps and bounds. However, instead, she had taken it upon herself to entrust this operation to the Zevon family that existed in the shadows.

"Pardon my impoliteness, Princess Carine, but...if the information on the target is so clear, instead of requesting us to do it, wouldn't His Majesty the Emperor would be more delighted if you drafted and commanded the subjugation operation yourself, Carine-sama?"

"That's not something filth needs to know."

It was an open insult, but Oiagro didn't mind at all.

"I said something intrusive. Please forgive me."

"It's fine, but keep this in mind. Everything I do is for the sake of His Majesty the Emperor, and not for my own gain."

"I'll take that to heart."

"Ah, there's one thing I forgot to tell. There will be an observer accompanying you on the subjugation operation in order to make sure it is carried out. Dasko!"

A young knight stood in front of Oiagro.

"Dasko la Clermont. My knight. I won't have any complaints about this."

"Yes, Your Highness."

The first thing that Oiagro Zevon started to do was collecting and sorting through the information that Carine had investigated about. The result was that everything was just as Carine had said—except, however, for one point. The important fact that someone within the Britannian royal court was involved in this anti-Britannia militant group's actions had been excluded from Carine's report. And then, Oiagro immediately understood.

"I don't know who they are, but she's blackmailing the member who controls the group, and is making arrangements so that the succession to the throne will advance in her favor—As expected of a Britannian princess."

'Power always whispers temptations of wickedness to those who seek it'. Oiagro was not an exception to that either.

In the past, in order to get his hands on all of the Zevon family, he had murdered his elder sister who had been the family head at the time—. However, not even Oiagro could have predicted that feelings of guilt over that act would sprout in his heart over time.

He spent everyday feeling tormented over what he had done. And then, the situation that dealt the final blow to his tortured self occurred. In accordance with his orders, Pluton executed some runaways from the Geass Order. One of the targets turned out to be his elder sister's orphaned child, Orpheus Zevon.

Oiagro hated the act he had committed at that time. Was this the punishment handed done to those like him who were entranced by darkness and had their hands dyed in blood?

However, Orpheus hadn't died. Having survived the attack by Pluton, Orpheus joined the anti-Britannia mercenary organization Peace Mark, fought as one of its members, and swore revenge against Pluton and his uncle Oiagro Zevon. Learning of this, Oiagro hid his history and supported the activities of Peace Mark as the mysterious sponser Wizard. All the while expecting that these actions would lead to his own destruction one day.

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"There's been a request from Wizard," Miss X said. "Britannia is trying to crush an anti-Britannian organization in southeast Asia using Pluton. He wants you to prevent it. Here are the details."

Saying this, Miss X distributed documents to Orpheus and the others. It was a skillfully processed version of the documents that Carine had handed to Oiagro, but of course none of the members of Peace Mark had any way of knowing that.

"All right, we'll accept it."

Orpheus answered promptly without even touching the documents.

"Hey, hey, wait a minute, Oz. I know that there is no reason for you to be informed about Pluton, but…I'd like to hear a bit more about it at least once," Zi said.

"That's right, there are still things you haven't told us, right? Besides, these fellows we're rescuing are certainly in the same anti-Britannia business, but they don't have that much of a connection with us, do they?"

Ganabati looked up from the documents at Miss X in his hands with a look.

"That's exactly why we accepted the request," she replied.

"What does that mean?" Zi asked.

"It means it's not bad to put them in our debt here," Miss X explained with a smile.

Ganabati prodded Orpheus' shoulder.

"Hey, do you see that, Oz… This must be the kind of smile the Devil wears."

"Either way, our lives are merchandise for sale. Don't let it bother you," Orpheus said.

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Six Knightmares were hiding themselves in a tropical jungle. Five of these frames were Sutherlands of Pluton that were given a jet-black coloring. The remaining one frame was the vividly red-colored Gekka Custom—the Knightmare that Dasko was piloting. This frame was a Japanese-made Knightmare Gekka that was captured in Area 11 and remodeled according to Dasko's orders. Once before, Dasko had test-piloted the Japanese Knightmare Guren Type-01 for

a test. Impressed by its performance, Dasko chose to pilot his new favorite kind of frame that was developed by the enemy, rather than Britannian-made Knightmares. Among the many knights that existed, not many made such a choice.

With the sun having set a long time ago, the light of the moon that rose over their heads outlined their complexly contrasting silhouettes.

Eventually, one of the Pluton pilots came out from within the shadows of the jungle's leaves. He used his hand to signal his comrades, told them that there was nothing abnormal in their path, and then returned to his cockpit.

The six Knightmares quietly rose up and started advancing forward.

However, they didn't know. That their movements were already being observed by Orpheus and the others.

"They've started to move."

Zi said that while watching the movements of the six Knightmares of Dasko's group displayed on his Knightmare's monitor. Following their strategy this time, Zi was using a Glasgow with a strengthened electronic military system.

"What should we do, Oz?"

Zi called out over the comm. line to Orpheus, who was remaining on stand-by at a location further away. Since the repairs to the Byakuen still had yet to be completed, Orpheus was piloting his customized white Glasgow this time as well.

"You don't need to even ask," Orpheus answered.

"Okay. Then first, let's try out our shaped charge anti-Knightmare landmine!"

With that, Zi flipped a console key.

An explosion occurred when the Pluton Knightmare squadron, who were advancing while circumventing around the dense trees, reduced their advance speed as they passed in between two deep groves of trees on both their sides. It was set off in the middle of the six frames that were advancing in a straight line. The anti-Knightmare landmine exploded at the feet of the third Sutherland in the line. The following plasma, which was created from the explosion of liquid Sakuradite that detonated on contact, became an intense metal jet according to the Neumann effect and instantly pulverized the Sutherland's leg drive mechanism.

"A landmine!?"

The reactions of the four Pluton Sutherlands that escaped damage were so quick that Dasko was involuntarily impressed. But they still couldn't escape from the shots fired by Zi's Glasgow.

The Sutherland who was at the front of the group had its head pierced and it fell where it stood, closing off the forward path of its allies.

An ambush, huh. They've made the first move.

Dasko clicked his tongue within his mind.

"Oz isn't the only one good at sniping, you know?"

Zi whispered quietly as he surmised the result of his sniping and watched the enemy's confusion using his sensors.

Despite having lost 1/3 of their force in an instant, Pluton's movements hadn't weakened.

At the same time as they quickly deployed themselves, they went into a counterattack formation against the Glasgow. But, Pluton's expectations were betrayed here as well.

The next attack was not a bombardment from out of range, but instead a close-range attack from a white Glasgow—from Orpheus.

The Glasgow jumped over one of the disabled Sutherlands, and advanced without stopping while piercing forward with its drill machine gun "Mince Maker".

"Fall back! Fall back!!"

Dasko overstepped his role as a mere observer and reflexively shouted out. This enemy was strong.

The front tip of the Mince Maker held by the white Glasgow penetrated the cockpit of the second Sutherland while rotating at high speeds. Orpheus fired the machine gun while in that same position, and then pulled out the Mince Maker from the Sutherland by using the firing recoil.

Panicked by Orpheus' quick work of that Sutherland, the fourth Sutherland hurriedly turned around, pushed aside his comrades and Dasko's frame, and tried to escape from there.

But, before its Landspinners could start up, an artillery shell that came flying from within the dark jungle pierced through its back.

"If you show me your back, I'm going to shoot you, you know?"

Zi confirmed that his target exploded over the monitor.

"Out of the way!"

Dasko quickly passed by the last remaining Pluton Sutherland and sprang towards the front of the white Glasgow. They couldn't

escape from this trap. The only way they could survive this situation was by beating the enemy before them.

The red Gekka Custom's weapon was the EM Lance that was Dasko's specialty weapon. With skilled and quick hands, he made many lunges with it at the Glasgow in rapid succession. But, the enemy displayed a dance-like step-work and dodged the point of the lance at paper-thin distances. Dasko recognized those movements.

"This guy... was in that Knightmare at Hong Kong!"

At the same time, Orpheus recognized the movements of the red Gekka.

"To think we would meet again here. It seems that we're connected by fate..."

Orpheus repelled Dasko's lance with the Mince Maker. An intense metallic sound resounded, and a flash and sparks tore through the darkness of the jungle.

Dasko called out to the only remaining undamaged Pluton Sutherland.

"Go! I'll hold him here. You go ahead and complete the mission!"

After saying that, Dasko rammed the Glasgow into a wall of thick trees.

"You have my thanks!"

The Sutherland quickly passed by the back of the Gekka Custom and advanced forward.

"!"

Orpheus tried to push back, but because of his unstable posture from the thick trees in his way, he couldn't push back against the Gekka Custom's full power dash very well.

But—.

Through his Factspheres, he heard the sound of an explosion from the darkness of the path ahead.

"I've disposed of the last Sutherland, Oz."

Zi's voice flowed over the comm. line.

"You should hurry up and finish that guy off as well."

"Yeah…I'll tear off his throat with my fangs!"

At the same time as Orpheus said that like a growl, he pierced the Mince Maker through the ground at his feet.

"What?"

Dasko unconsciously muttered as he watched the white Glasgow's unexpected movement. Then, the next instant—the Glasgow spun around at high speed using the drill piercing the ground as its axis, and threw a strong kick at the Gekka Custom.

"Uooh!"

The Gekka Custom was knocked down by the impact and its posture was destroyed.

"Here's the finishing blow!"

The Glasgow drew the Mince Maker out from the ground and lunged it at the Gekka Custom. But, the ejection system activated an instant faster, and the cockpit containing Dasko flew away deep into the dark jungle.

"So he got away, Oz?" Zi said.

"Yeah. But—" Orpheus muttered quietly towards the endless darkness. "—I'll probably meet that guy again somewhere."

Chapter 7

The White Death God Dances In The Blue Sky

Chapter 7: The White Death God Dances In The Blue Sky

"With the water temperature being what it is, you won't last long, so be careful not to slip and fall into the sea. The edge of the submarine is slippery, and it's so dark that I doubt anyone will find you before sunrise," Ganabati said, chuckling.

Zi, who was on his knees at the side of the submarine and had finished emptying the contents of his stomach into the sea, wiped his mouth and turned around with watery eyes.

"Ugh…Forgive me…"

His face was pale from being hit by severe seasickness. Usually he would retort back fiercely, but it seemed that he didn't have the energy for it this morning.

"Do you have any questions, Oz?"

Rakshata Chawla asked as she pointed at Orpheus with her trademark pipe. Orpheus shook his head.

"I already have everything about this operation in my head. The problem is whether or not it will actually work according to your plan."

Orpheus looked up at his beloved machine that he now met again after such a long time.

"Oh my. It couldn't be that you doubt me, do you? Though I say that, failure is a natural accompaniment when anything is done for the first time. It's impossible to make 100% guarantees. The only thing I can say is that I gave it my 100% best."

"Hearing that from you is enough."

Orpheus gave a thin smile.

The huge submarine was slowly gliding over the waters off the western coast of Norway, near the boundary line between the North Sea and the Norwegian Sea. It was a moonless night. The starlight wasn't strong enough to illuminate the deep darkness that came just before dawn, and it wasn't possible to see the jet-black sea that spread out around them with the naked eye.

On the deck with all its lights blacked-out, men and women equipped with infrared goggles were silently taking care of the Byakuen's takeoff preparations. The ECM and ECCM were still functioning, but the possibility of this submarine being accidentally discovered by HUMINT—information gathering through human eyes and ears—by information collection gathered by human eyes and ears was not zero.

In order to avoid being detected from land, the crew of the submarine was notified that they couldn't approach the coast any

closer. Beyond this point was within the sphere of the Britannian Navy's anti-submarine patrol web.

Orpheus boarded the Byakuen. It was the reborn "Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version" that was equipped with the Flight Glide Wings—a form of Float System developed by Rakshata.

"...I asked them to repair it, but they put in an unbelievable addition."

Hearing that quiet murmur from Orpheus, Ganabati raised his head as he did the pre-flight check.

"Ah? What did you say, Oz?"

"I was talking to myself."

Orpheus activated the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version.

"We've received communication from the ground troops. They're also standing-by just as arranged...so with that, I'll be counting on you," Rakshata said.

"You mean, for the real battle data on the Flight Glide Wings? Or do you mean for the other part of the mission?" Zi said, seeming to be feeling somewhat better after letting all that out before.

"Obviously, for both."

Rakshata smiled sweetly.

"I'm taking off."

The Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version slowly floated up from the deck, and started moving towards the surface of the deep black sea.

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The mission's target was the Sakuradite mining base that the Euro Britannia army was building in Norway on the Scandinavian Peninsula. Geologists estimated that the vein deposits here were equivalent to 30 years worth of Euro Britannia's needs. If full-scale mining started, it would be unavoidable that the resistance groups in Europe persisting in their fight against Britannia would be dealt a great blow. However, the highly explosive Sakuradite-related facility could not be simply destroyed. If an explosion caused a chain reaction within the entire vein, the whole Nordic region might collapse. If that happened, the entire continent of Europe would be devastated.

"That's why we're going to sink and submerge the entire facility. If we do that, we can make the facility impossible to use without causing an explosion. Also, if it goes well, local groups could later occupy and make use of the facility."

On the topographical map that Miss X displayed during the briefing session, it was indicated that there was a dam at Gudvangen that lied upstream of the river that adjoined the mining base.

"Of course, the Britannian army is prepared for such an attack and has placed forces at the dam."

Miss X displayed the artillery composite platform that defended the dam. On the concrete-made pedestal that had been created so that it nestled close to the surface of the dam's wall, several artillery cannons with various ranges and firing angles that were connected to a fire-control radar were installed, and so everything that approached the dam would be completely pulverized. Attacks by multiple groups including the special forces of the E.U. regular army had been tried against it until now, but they were entirely repelled by this impenetrable wall's defenses.

However, they hadn't given up. The resistance groups in Europe were going to attempt a final attack by concentrating all of their firepower in order to destroy the dam.

"How tenacious. As expected of the descendants of Vikings."

Ganabati said. However, it was clear that they wouldn't be able to make a dent in it if they attacked using the same tactics.

"And that's where you guys from Peace Mark come in," Miss X said.

Preceding the bombardment of the ground troops, Orpheus' Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version would penetrate inland along the fjord. He would neutralize the dam defenses with close-range attacks and support the bombardment attack.

"There's something I'd like to ask. Isn't Oz in the most dangerous position here?" Zi pouted.

"Do you think it will be possible with me and the Byakuen?" Orpheus asked Miss X.

"Yes. This is a job only you can do, Oz."

"I understand. Then, it's decided."

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The Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version avoided radar detection and penetrated into the Sognefjord from the southern coast of Hardbakke at low altitude. Orpheus looked at the navigation screen displayed on his console. He flew 40 km without rest along the mouth of the river that opened widely, and changed course towards the northeast. From there, he lowered his altitude further and almost grazed the water, pushing further inland. The flight was

going well. The performance of the Flight Glide Wings that used the Float System was perfect.

This system will completely change the battlefield landscape...!

Orpheus envisioned the Knightmares, both allies and enemies, soaring through the sky and clashing. It was a striking and brilliantly hellish scene.

His navigation told him he had reached the next course-changing point. He complexly bent his course left and right, and increased his course similarity to the shape of the fjord. When he had penetrated up to Leikanger area about 160km inland from the mouth of the river, the eastern sky started brightening. The Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version took the course towards the tributary that led to his destination of Gudvangen.

Rising sharply on either side, the fjord grew ever more treacherous. Weaving through it, Orpheus flew the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version with almost suicidal speed. He was not flying while depending on only the information from his Factspheres right now. Although he was not conscious of it himself, his sensitivity that had been honed to the limit as a Geass user ran through the Knightmare's armor and let him directly perceive the surrounding space. Although even Orpheus himself didn't know it, he was doing something at this very moment that only he could do.

Suddenly, the Gudvangen dam appeared before him.

Orpheus manipulated his control stick with quick but delicate movements and made the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version ascend.

The wall of the dam drew closer at a violent speed. However, the climbing angle of the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version was slightly insufficient. If he crashed, he wouldn't be able to avoid catastrophic damage. But—

"Eat my fang!"

Orpheus activated the Type Seven Integrated Armament Right Arm Unit. He selected the super-high output electromagnetic acceleration cannon. He loaded 70mm explosive cartridges that contained highly concentrated liquid Sakuradite in the cartridge chamber, and aimed it at the pedestal of artillery guns that protected the dam. Through the vision of his Factspheres that electronically intensified the light intensity, he saw in the dim light of dawn the figures of Britannian soldiers desperately trying to intercept the Byakuen. However, they wouldn't make it in time. Orpheus pulled the trigger. He fired artillery shells one after another along with the shrill sound of cannon fire. Using the recoil from the shot, he also corrected the ascending angle of the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version, and then drew a beautiful curve through the air and ran over to the sky over the dam wall.

And at the same time, an intense explosion occurred at the impact point of the 70mm explosive cartridge. Orpheus had driven the cannon shell into the gun barrel of a 200mm field gun with the greatest caliber among the artillery group. Like a scalpel brandished by a skilled brain surgeon, the explosive cartridge that flew into the gun barrel with a precise aim released the energy of its Sakuradite at the bottom of the gun chamber, and the tail end of the 200mm field gun was blown away. The armor fragments blown away by it and the blast torn apart the surrounding soldiers, and pulverized all the equipment and facilities. The concrete platform collapsed from the following explosions that occurred one after another, and detached from the dam wall and fell down to the fjord below. Burnt steel, concrete, and also countless soldiers were throw down beneath the dark water's surface.

The ground troops, who had advanced near the dam at the signal from Orpheus′ attack, started their bombardment. There was no counterattack from Britannia.

Artillery shells exploded on the surface of the dam wall one after another. Lumps of concrete were blown away and countless crack appear on the wall. However, the dam that had been built to oppose mighty water pressure did not simply crumble and collapse.

Orpheus reversed the course of the Byakuen. He switched the artillery shells of his electromagnetic acceleration gun to a sabot-type 30mm high initial velocity Tungsten steel piercing shell. He aimed at the maintenance road on the upper part of the dam, and fired rapidly five times. The armor piercing shells impacted within a 1m diameter circular area, and created a mortar-like hole. But, the dam still stood.

"This will finish it!"

Orpheus switched the Type Seven Integrated Weapons Right Arm Unit to the drill, and made the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version swoop down toward the center of the mortar hole at high speed.

With a terrible impact, the whole dam seemed to shake for an instant. And then—finally, the whole structure collapsed.

The huge amount of water that had been held back easily blew away huge lumps of concrete, and fell down into the fjord that had become a muddy stream that no one could resist.

"Mission complete," Orpheus said.

The muddy stream would submerge the Britannian Sakuradite mining base, and keep it beyond recovery for a long period of time.

And the real battle test of the Byakuen Flight-Enabled Version that carried the Flight Glide Wings had also been a complete success on the first try.

Chapter 8

A Dangerous Game

Chapter 8: A Dangerous Game

The afternoon sunlight shone down from the gaps in the deep-green tree canopy, illuminating the surface of the river with speckles of light. Kicking up dark waves as it moved, a civilian transport ship slowly went upstream on the river. It was a river transport ship with a structure common to this region—the southern borderland of the Chinese Federation near Southeast Asia. The one steering the ship in the simple-structured bridge was Ganabati. Although it had the dull appearance of a transport ship, it was actually a Peace Mark camouflaged transport ship for Knightmares, which Ganabati had rallied to construct using all his brainpower and technology.

After confirming that signs of human habitation could no longer be seen on the coast and that other boat traffic had also

stopped, Ganabati checked the sonar screen for the river bottom's status.

"Oz, the water depth around here is the deepest we've found."

"Roger."

Orpheus' voice flowed out from the ear monitor that was placed in Ganabati's ear.

"Just as planned, I'll wait here for 12 hours. If you and Zi don't return by then..."

"I have no intention of making you wait."

Ganabati shrugged his shoulders at Orpheus' emotionless voice. It was foolish of him to have asked such a question.

A large air-tight container was attached underneath the bottom of the transport ship. Orpheus' Byakuen and Zi's Glasgow were stored inside it. The container's surface was covered with an optical refraction membrane, making it almost impossible to see even if one peered in from above the water.

The Byakuen and the Glasgow slowly left their hangars. Ganabati had stopped the ship at this position because if they went further upstream, the hangar would grate against the river bottom.

Watching the uprush of water on the river's surface that signalled the movements of the two Knightmares, Ganabati then cut the ship's motor and brought the ship's hull alongside the bank out of habit.

"...Geez. That Miss X sure brings us troublesome requests each and every time."

After murmuring that, Ganabati waited for the return of Orpheus and Zi while pretending to be an unfortunate captain whose motor had broke down.

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"Have you guys ever heard of Kyushu?"

In response to Miss X's question, Zi shrugged his shoulders, and Ganabati made a joke asking if it was the name of some new cocktail.

"It's a district in Area 11."

Only Orpheus responded expressionlessly.

"As expected of you, Oz. You're different from those pieces of junk over there."

"Oz is just too serious and diligent. I at least know about Kyushu, you know? Since it was where Britannia and the Black Knights had a combined operation together not that long ago," Zi retorted.

Based on Ganabati's expression, it was clear that he too knew about that place.

"I'm relieved to hear that."

Without showing any sign of anger towards how those two made fun of her, Miss X continued speaking.

"Then, you must naturally know who was the central figure of that incident, right?"

"!..."

Zi and Ganabati involuntarily found themselves unable to respond. As Miss X gave a satisfied smile at their flustered reactions, Orpheus opened his mouth.

"Atsushi Sawazaki. The last Chief Cabinet Secretary from the time when Area 11 was the sovereign nation of Japan. Sawazaki conspired with General Cao of the Chinese Federation, and tried to release Kyushu from Britannia's rule. The ones who defeated him

were the leader of the Black Knights, Zero, and the then Sub-Viceroy Euphemia's knight, Suzaku Kururugi."

"That's... correct."

Miss X was taken by surprise by Orpheus' knowledge.

"Then, this time, are we going to Area 11?"

Zi's eyes gleamed in interest.

"Speaking of which, Rakshata, the one who attached wings to the Byakuen recently, also cooperates with the Black Knights, right? Is it perhaps related to that?"

"Hey, hey, didn't the Black Knights' leader Zero disappear, and their organization got scattered and dispersed? Is it all right to help a group that's on the decline like that?" Ganabati spoke with a suspicious tone.

"Don't worry. This offer is related to neither Area 11 nor the Black Knights."

Miss X smiled sweetly, and then began explaining the mission this time. The content of the operation was the elimination of a certain person—in other words, an assassination.

"Atsushi Sawazaki had a son named Yukimaro. Your target is him."

Miss X showed the photo of an Oriental man to Orpheus and the others. Although he was still young, his eyes were full of ambition and cunning. Yukimaro's father Atsushi had failed in his uprising at Kyushu and been captured, and had later been executed by Britannia. At that time, Yukimaro, who had already been working as his father's right-hand man, had escaped Britannia's investigations and washed ashore in the Chinese Federation. Normally, he would have been left to rot, but this man had demonstrated his real value from there on.

Yukimaro had been captured along with his father, and afterwards he had been repatriated along with General Cao due to negotiations with Britannia and given over to the High Eunuchs of the district military party that had supported the general, and then he had been recognized as the successor to Sawazaki Atsushi who had declared himself the legitimate Japanese government. And then, he established the Japanese government-in-exile in the southern border regions of the Chinese Federation.

"Government-in-exile? That didn't appear in the news, now did it?"

Ganabati tilted his head in puzzlement.

"It hasn't been announced yet. Because of a certain reason."

Miss X's words touched on conviction.

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In his cockpit, Orpheus repeatedly checked the surroundings of Yukimaro's headquarters through the Byakuen's Factspheres. And the more he looked it over, the more he had to admit that the place was an invulnerable stronghold.

"This Yukimaro is one sly guy. After getting on the good side of the High Eunuchs and shrewdly getting this base, he makes friends with Britannia."

"He probably intends to maintain the power balance as a small-time crook."

Orpheus responded to Zi's voice that flowed out from the communications system. The headquarters of the reborn independent nation of Japan were in the middle of ancient Chinese

religious ruins that the two of them were now surveying. Yukimaro had converted the huge ruins, which had been built by drilling into a mountain surrounded by jungle, as a base for the militia group he commanded. However, that was not the reason the client wanted Yukimaro to be eliminated. Yukimaro was likely going to hand over this facility to Britannia as a base for Britannia's conquest of the Chinese Federation. It was a piece of unskillful double-dealing diplomacy. This, Miss X had told them, was the reason that Yukimaro still hadn't been announced as the head of the legitimate Japanese government.

"He probably intends to keep himself safe by playing both sides with Britannia and the Chinese Federation…but his use of mentioning the N-funds to ensure his own safety was fatal for him."

The N-funds were the huge amount of military fund that were said to have been concealed by the former Kururugi government just before Japan surrendered unconditionally to Japan. Yukimaro intended to manipulate the Chinese Federation's High Eunuchs and certain members of the Britannia Imperial Family by dazzling them with the existence of those funds. However, that was a mine he never should have stepped on. Yukimaro had provoked the dark force of imperial wrath by using the rumor of the N-funds.

"These so-called N-funds are, after all, like an urban legend, right?"

"Whether or not it's a legend, the offer to Peace Mark is a fact," Orpheus said curtly.

Yukimaro had dabbled in a dangerous game, and offended someone. The time to pay the price of that had come.

"Even if you say that… The more we learn about this place, the more it has a troublesome structure."

Zi sighed as he checked through the data the client had provided them beforehand and then the data the two of them had actually gathered themselves. Yukimaro's headquarters was literally a cave. The mountain that surrounded it had a strength that could withstand even airstrikes. That was the reason the Byakuen wasn't equipped with its Float System this time as well. Ground troops would have to be sent in order to take down Yukimaro who was confined inside a cave. However, the jungle that was in their path hindrance a large force, and if they did go in Yukimaro would easily escape and conceal himself. Therefore, the attack would have to be done with a force of a select few.

"It's just as we thought. There's only one strategy to use."

Orpheus said. Just as they planned beforehand, they would launch an attack with brute force.

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Even among the weapons of the Type Seven Integrated Weapons Unit that was equipped to the Byakuen, the one with the greatest power was the variable-caliber super-high output electromagnetic acceleration cannon. By narrowing down the bullet and combining it with the environmental data obtained from the Byakuen's strengthened Factspheres, it was easy to shoot down two sentry Knightmares located at the entrance of the ruins used as Yukimaro's base.

Orpheus fired a 30mm Teflon-coated Tungsten bullet into each of the two targets he had locked onto. Since the discharge interval between shots was so short, Zi only heard the sound of a

single shot from beside him. The two Gang Lous whose cockpits had been directly pierced continued standing as if nothing had happened due to the stabilization mechanism in their three legs. But, the pilots inside them had already died, with grey brain matter splattered inside the cockpits.

The interior of the ruins has a three-layered structure. The headquarters, where Yukimaro is, is on the highest floor. Each floor is heavily protected by Gang Lous and Burais. In other words, in order to take down Yukimaro, you have to break through the squadrons that protect each floor, Miss X had said.

In response to her words, Orpheus had given a faint smile for the first time.

"I don't hate it. That kind of movie-like situation."

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Orpheus' Byakuen and Zi's Glasgow rushed into the ruins at once. As an alarm resounded noisily inside the base, they would eliminate all the enemies blocking their way and go kill their target Yukimaro Sawazaki.

The enemy's Knightmare forces were comprised of variants of Gang Lous, originally developed by the Chinese Federation, and Burais, a Japanese copy of the Britannia's Glasgow. Both were outdated Knightmares, and the Gang Lou in particular had considerably inferior mobility due to its two-leg walking control system being incomplete and as such could not strictly be called a Knightmare. However, Yukimaro had tried to compensate their lack of mobility with pure numbers, and that method had been

considered effective enough in these ruins—until the two Knightmares from Peace Mark came.

The first floor.

The Byakuen took out its large blade from the Type Seven and rushed into the midst of the enemy while violently swerving left and right. In an instant, a group of Gang Lous had their arms, legs and torso cut off and scattered around all over the place as scrap. Following behind Orpheus, Zi's Glasgow originally had the same basic structure as the Burais, but thanks to a refit done by Ganabati at Zi's request, it had been improved to the point that it could almost be called an entirely different machine.

"Don't lump me in with mass-produced machines!"

Zi horizontally fired his two anti-aircraft guns and filled the surrounding space with bullets. The throng of enemies had their armor torn off and scattered as if sent through a shredder.

The Byakuen and the Glasgow reached the second floor.

Gang Lous and Burais formed a thick phalanx and rushed forward in order to block the corridor that connected to the floor above. Orpheus changed the Byakuen's weapon from the blade to the drill. Then, he literally dug a hole through the enemy's wall.

The Byakuen rushed forward and skewered a Gang-Lou and a Burai in front of it at once. An enemy tried to attack him from the side as the Byakuen momentarily stopped moving, but it was taken down by Zi's Glasgow. With their close formation destroyed, the enemy Knightmares got in each other's way and restricted each other's freedom of movement. On the other hand, Orpheus had no such restrictions. All the machines around him were enemies. Therefore, he could simply take them all down. By mowing them down, tearing them apart, smashing and piercing, the Byakuen opened a path through the throng. Orpheus used his Slash Harken

to instantly jump into the center of the enemy. Zi's Glasgow was still fighting with the enemies at the bottom of the passage.

The third floor—where Yukimaro Sawazaki was.

The enemy attacked the Byakuen with an impenetrable defence around the throne where Yukimaro had barricaded himself. Hatred and terror was visible on the face of the man in question when Orpheus caught a glimpse of him through a gap among the enemies.

The enemy drove at the Byakuen in throngs. Even if he overpowered them in performance ability, they could have reliably crushed the Byakuen with their numbers. However, at that instant, all the Knightmares suddenly lost power, Orpheus had activated his diffusive radiation wave device—the Gefjun Breaker! The power supply from the Sakuradite was cut off, and not only the Knightmares here, but all the machinery within the area stopped functioning. Of course, the Byakuen wasn't an exception to this either. But…

"Hey, sorry for the wait!"

Zi's Glasgow slowly appeared from the second floor. In its hand was a spare Energy Filler which had been placed under the influence of the Gefjun Breaker. It was for this reason that Zi had remained on the floor below.

In the short time it took for the Byakuen to reboot, the pilots of the disabled Gang-Lous and Burais scrambled out of their machines and ran away. Not a single one of them tried to protect Yukimaro with their firearms.

"Oh my, Mr. Yukimaro really isn't popular," Zi laughed.

Orpheus switched the Byakuen's equipment to the electromagnetic acceleration cannon, and aimed it at the paralyzed Yukimaro Sawazaki.

“Playtime is over.”

A shower of rapid-fire 30mm Teflon-coated Tungsten bullets rained down, and Yukimaro’s body exploded like a water balloon and scattered into the surroundings before vanishing.

Chapter 9
Guidepost

Chapter 9: Guidepost

Hyuuruuruu—

The artillery shell, as it cut through the air, emitted a sharp whistle, similar to a dying scream. When the pitch reached its peak due to the Doppler effect, the shell reached a business complex about 30 m away from the Byakuen. The electrical energy stored in the warhead activated an explosive compound within them, releasing a huge amount of thermal energy all at once. A tremendous explosion occurred, and the pulverized portions of the building were sent flying all over the ground. Those pieces also rained down on the Byakuen, which was hiding itself in the shadow of a trailer car that had been turned on its side along the roadside. Of course, the Byakuen wasn't covered with damage due to an impact of that extent.

Sitting in the cockpit, Orpheus Zevon had a calm—no, an even more expressionless face than usual as he checked the surrounding

situation through his Factspheres. The reason for his lack of expression was because, right behind Orpheus, there was a girl stuffed into the auxiliary seat that had been temporarily built into the cockpit.

"U-Um! Can't you hear some kind of clanking noise!? Is it okay? No, rather, it should be okay, right? The Byakuen's armour wouldn't be dented by fragments like this. Ah, but there's been that clanging noise since earlier. It's the sound of fragments hitting the armour, right? Could it be... if they hit the wrong spot or something... b-but, still, this much should be fine, right!?"

The girl, half in a panic, shook Orpheus's shoulder roughly. It was a sight that would have made Miss X faint if she had seen it. Shutting out the incoherent and looping words of the girl from his consciousness, Orpheus concentrated on the information being sent through his camera monitors. Although the second and third artillery shells exploded, they had fallen farther away from them than the first shot.

Eastern Germany — the capital, Berlin. Orpheus and the others were in the center of the city. Since urban battles between the E.U. and Euro Britannia had occurred countless times there, the city was desolate and in ruins. After confirming that the enemy hadn't grasped the position of the Byakuen, Orpheus cautiously turned to face the girl in the auxiliary seat, who was trembling as the tension finally went out of her. Whether it was because she was tired from shouting or had given up since Orpheus never replied to her, she was now quiet.

"Have you calmed down?"

"Yes...um, I'm sorry...I can never get used to situations like this..."

Watching as the girl became dejected like a different person, Orpheus gave a rare wry smile.

Neha Shankar, age 15. Just as her name and dark swarthy skin indicated, she was from India. However, although it couldn't be imagined from her short stature and innocent looks, she was regarded as one of the young aces in the next generation of the Knightmare engineering community.

No, rather than an ace, she's more of an idol.

Orpheus gave another wry smile, but it was noticed.

"Ah, why did you smile just now? Is it because…I shouted loudly?"

"Don't worry about it. I wasn't laughing at you."

"But…"

"Oz! It seems this round of bombardment is over."

As if interrupting Neha's word, Zi's voice flowed out from the communicator. Zi had gone 50 meters ahead of the Byakuen aboard his Glasgow and had hidden his machine in the shadow of rubble created from some crashed buildings.

"We'll move forward, then. Make sure to cover us."

"Roger. Hey, little girlie at the back."

At first looking blankly as she heard Zi's suddenly blunt voice, Neha soon realized that the "little girlie" was directed towards her.

"L-Little girlie!? Do you mean me!?"

"Who else would I be talking to? If you wanna make it out of Berlin alive, don't start screaming and getting in Oz's way like you did earlier."

"I-I wasn't screaming—!"

"Let me tell it to you clearly. I can't stomach how a brat blessed with a comfortable and easy life like you is researching something like Knightmare development. Just remember that."

"!..."

Orpheus sensed Neha catch her breath behind him.

"Are you satisfied now, Zi? We should go soon."

"...Yeah."

Orpheus made the Byakuen rise out from the shadow of the trailer vehicle, and began to move southwest down Greifswald Street using his Landspinners.

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Several days before...

"I'd like for you guys to escort this girl to Rakshata."

While visiting the Peace Mark hideout, Miss X showed Orpheus and the others Neha Shankar's data. The prodigy girl who was accepted to the E.U. General Engineering University at a young age, Neha Shankar—everyone expected that her interest and talent would bring about ground-breaking progress in Knightmare-related engineering fields.

"Heh...A girl like this, huh. Looks like the retirement of oldsters like me isn't far away," Ganabati said.

Zi, on the other hand, frowned as he looked at Neha's profile.

"...A weapons geek, huh."

"What is it, Zi? Your face says you don't like it."

"Yeah, I don't like it. Soldiers like us are supposed to risk our lives with weapons made by a brat like this?"

Zi flicked the monitor that displayed Neha's wide-eyed face with his finger.

“If your personal feelings are going to get in the way of this mission, please say so clearly. I’ll remove you from the mission.” Miss X said.

Zi shrugged and shook his head.

“Neha Shankar wishes to move from the E.U. to a research base where Rakshata is. Since Euro Britannia also have their eyes on her talent, it's a sensible decision in the current situation.”

Miss X said that Neha’s talent might influence the state of the war. They were to secure her person in Berlin and guard her as she was transported abroad. For Peace Mark, this was an easy job.

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“I had a bad feeling about this from the beginning.”

Zi’s complaining voice flowed out from the communicator. The job that should have been easy had changed into a desperate escape battle soon after Orpheus and Zi had joined up with Neha. Spies who had infiltrated the E.U. agency that had been the intermediary for this mission had called a squadron of the Euro Britannia army in order to prevent Neha’s departure from the country. As a result, Orpheus and the others had gotten caught up in a Knightmare battle within the devastated ruins of Berlin.

“There was already warning signs when Miss X said it would be easy, damn it.”

Zi’s Glasgow readied its two chain-machine guns and searched for enemies nearby. It seemed that the enemy were hiding among the ruins while aiming at Orpheus and the others.

"Umm…won't any support or backup come for us?" Neha timidly asked.

"The E.U. is already sending a backup squadron."

"Eh? When did you call for them?"

"While you were shouting earlier."

"…Ah, but thank goodness! Then we just have to hold on a little longer, right?"

"Unfortunately, that's not the case. The enemy reinforcements will arrive first."

Orpheus shifted his body in order to show the display of the wider battle situation to Neha.

"No way…"

Neha's face started to tear up. Deciding that another bout of panic on her part would be bad, Orpheus gave a weak smile.

"Don't worry. It's not a problem."

"Are you sure, Oz?" Zi said.

There was clearly concern in his tone. Certainly, this situation definitely did not allow for any optimism. But…

"Our reinforcements are currently approaching from the west side of Berlin. We'll head over there and shorten the distance between us."

Orpheus pointed at a location called Kreuzberg in the southwestern part of Berlin's streets.

"The meet-up point is here."

Zi quickly looked up the course in his Glasgow. The destination was about 5 km away from them. It was such a short distance that you could barely call it a drive away.

"It's close even by walking…isn't it?"

It was just as Neha said. However, those 5 km were crowded with enemies.

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The orders given to the special Knightmare battle team of the Euro Britannia army were brief.

1. Stop Neha Shankar from leaving the country and take her into custody.

2. In the case that restraining her should be difficult, eliminate the strategic target.

The commander of the battle team had deployed his squadron according to instructions and attacked Neha. However, despite having a perfect organization, the attack was repelled by the two Knightmares that had appeared to transport her. The team suffered heavy losses and was forced to withdraw and reorganize. But, the orders they had received were still in effect.

The commander had rearranged the squadron with the capture of Neha as the top priority. Their plan was to cut off Peace Mark's escape routes to steal time, wait for the reinforcements to arrive and secure overwhelming superiority, and then demand the enemy's surrender. However, what the commander didn't know was that the force tasked with transporting Neha was the strongest private military organization, Peace Mark—and that they wouldn't sit and wait quietly for defeat.

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Orpheus′ Byakuen and Zi′s Glasgow moved forward in turns while covering each other. Whenever enemies attacked the machine that was moving forward at the time, the person covering them would shoot and eliminate them. By repeating this, Orpheus and the others succeeded in crossing through Alexanderplatz Square in the center of the city, and made it into western Berlin.

"What a simple tactic."

The remark came from Neha, watching with interest as Orpheus and Zi operated their Knightmares. As expected, her curiosity as a Knightmare engineering specialist ultimately outweighed her fear of battle.

"...Yeah," Orpheus responded with few words.

Right now, it was Zi′s turn to move forward. His senses were completely turned towards his partner′s advance. He could see a small shadow moving at the corner of his monitor. He at once aimed his Type Seven Integrated Armaments unit at it and fired a 30mm high-velocity Tungsten armor-piercing shell. The cockpit of a Euro Britannia-type Sutherland that had been leaning out from the terrace of a skyscraper was pierced, and it fell down. Using, his enhanced Factspheres, his enemy-searching system detected three other Knightmares. With an unbroken flow of motion, Orpheus knocked them down one after another.

"Amazing...!"

Neha′s voice leaked out as she leaned forward from the rear auxiliary seat. Since she said things like that loudly right next to his ear every time he eliminated an enemy, it was incredibly distracting for Orpheus—though he didn′t let it show in the slightest.

Zi′s Glasgow hid itself in the shadow of a building they had ascertained of beforehand, and then Orpheus made the Byakuen advance. Although a new wave of Sutherlands and Glasgows

appeared from the surroundings, Orpheus did not slow down the Byakuen. He squeezed out as much speed as he could on the desolated road surface and aimed towards the entrance of the building where Zi was hiding himself. It was an act that would have been impossible if he did not believe that Zi's covering fire would definitely eliminate the enemies. After almost jumping the last 10 meters, the Byakuen fell in beside the Glasgow.

"Oz! It seems like the enemy has figured out our aim," Zi said.

Orpheus confirmed the battle situation and knew those words were correct. The enemy was trying to squeeze them into an encirclement ring despite the heavy damage they had received. They had sensed that E.U. reinforcements were approaching and so were hurrying to finish the battle.

Orpheus checked the ground. The enemies had crossed the Gertrauden Bridge a moment ago and were currently on the boundary between Axel-Springer Street and Linden Street. If they immediately went south down Linden Street from here, their destination —Kreuzberg—would be right in front of them. And without a doubt, the enemy had already realized that was their goal.

"We'll have to cut across all at once," Orpheus said.

"I figured it would turn out like this."

Zi's voice carried a hint of a wry smile from the other side of the communicator.

"Um…I'm sorry, for having you go through this for my sake…" Neha lowered her head as she said that.

"Don't misunderstand, brat. We're fighting because we want to survive."

"…"

Neha gave an expression that showed that she didn't understand what Zi meant. For the first time since this battle had

started, Orpheus twisted his body around and looked directly at Neha's face.

"We chose this mission of our own free will. No one forced us. This is our job. That's all."

Without waiting for Neha's response, Orpheus turned back around.

"Let's go, Zi."

"Roger!"

The Byakuen and Glasgow commenced their advance forward.

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By the time they arrived at the Kreutzberg plaza, the two Knightmares were damaged all over. However, although their appearance conveyed extreme damage, their combat efficiency hadn't dropped at all. Once she was allowed to come down from the Knightmare after the E.U. reinforcement ensured their safety around them, Neha confirmed with her eyes that the Byakuen and Glasgow hadn't received any fatal damage, and was once again astonished by Orpheus and Zi's excellent skill.

"This is…how Peace Mark fights, huh…"

Neha remembered the fierceness of the battle they had gotten through.

"This is what our daily life is like. Well, not that you'll be part of it anymore," Zi said as he stopped his hand from checking the exterior of his machine.

Orpheus turned to Neha and spoke:

"Neha. How about you tell Zi the truth?"

"! …You noticed?"

"I saw the way you boarded the Byakuen, after all."

Zi gave the two of them a puzzled look at their exchange.

"...Very well. Please look over here, Mr. Zi."

After saying that, Neha grasped and raised the hem of her long ankle-length skirt.

"Aah? Why are you suddenly holding up your skirt...!"

Zi fell silent, words failing him. What appeared from underneath the skirt were, completely unlike the girl's lovely appearance, a set of crude mechanical legs—artificial legs. And what's more, this set was an early model.

"I was caught up in a battle five years ago—and I ended up having to have my legs amputated."

The one who attached artificial legs to Neha was Rakshata. Back in those days, Rakshata had been a leading scientist in body prosthetic medical engineering. Since then, Rakshata became Neha's aspiration.

"That's why, I also wanted to help someone like Dr. Rakshata did for me. I wanted to follow the same path as her. But..."

Rakshata had left medical engineering and thrown herself into the world of Knightmare development. When Neha learned that the scientist had chosen to take part in the war, she was disheartened. But in time, she came to understand that Rakshata had steeled her heart for the sake of a greater goal—to end the war—, and had devoted herself to Knightmare development, even though it tore her apart inside.

"What...this is the first time I've heard of that," Zi said.

"The professor never talks about such things herself."

After learning Rakshata's true intentions, Neha also changed her career path to being a Knightmare developer in order to devote

herself to that great labor. She wanted, more than anything, to support and assist Rakshata's work in any way she could.

"These legs break down a lot. Since they're already old…But, I don't want to change to new ones. Because these legs are the guidepost between me and professor Rakshata."

As she said that, Neha lovingly caressed the outdated prosthetic legs that had marks of repair here and there.

Chapter 10

Star of Bad Omen, Sparkling

Chapter 10: Star of Bad Omen, Sparkling

It wasn't uncommon for Peace Mark members to be offered urgent missions. However, even among them, a mission as urgent as this was unusual.

"We're out of time, Oz," Wizard said.

On this occasion, the magnanimous patron of Peace Mark and man of mystery, Wizard himself, served as the liaison; thus, this mission had acquired an exceedingly high degree of urgency, that much was clear.

Not yet 12 hours had passed since Orpheus and his allies had completed the operation to extract Neha Shankar from Berlin. Of course, the situation was such that the maintenance on his battle-damaged Knightmare hadn't even been started yet.

Orpheus inquired, "This is a direct offer from Wizard. So I understand that this is an important mission. But what am I going to do if I can't use the Byakuen?"

"Not a problem. For this mission, a Knightmare won't be necessary. What the client needs is you, Oz, because you alone are in possession of a special skill."

"……"

Orpheus looked at Wizard's face. However, there was no way to see his expression behind the mask.

Orpheus Zevon had the power of Geass, which allowed him to "transform" into any human he had ever met face-to-face. To be more precise, Orpheus had the ability to make those around him believe that he had changed into a different person.

This phenomenon was different from a purely physical disguise. The outward appearance of Orpheus himself remained completely unchanged. Nevertheless, the brains of others who had met him face-to-face got thoroughly deceived by Orpheus. It could be said to be similar to hypnosis, but differed in that it worked just as effectively on someone who was far away and out of reach of the user, Orpheus, as if he were right in front of them and therefore it could be said to be a much more powerful ability than ordinary hypnosis.

This ability was Orpheus Zevon of Peace Mark's greatest trump card, and for that reason only those closest to him knew of the existence of this ability. Wizard was one of them. However, this was the first time that a mission had been offered based on the existence of this ability. This also spoke to the importance of the mission.

"Just this once, I have to rely on your supernatural ability. Please, won't you accept this offer?"

"I owe you a debt. I'll take it," Orpheus answered immediately. Then, Wizard explained the parameters of the mission.

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Vienna, the capital of Austria, was at the transportation, intelligence, and financial crossroads of the entire European theater. Therefore, the city became the center of information warfare in Europe.

In this city, there was an old man called the "Seer". His birthplace, age, and real name were all unknown. The only two things we knew are that he is an elderly man and that he worked as an astrologer. Due to his outstanding ability to predict the future, the "Seer" was both highly trusted and feared by the people who occupied key positions in European political and business circles. Of course, the leaders of Euro Britannia were no exception.

"It's always been Britannian nature to be attracted to the occult," Orpheus laughed.

Indeed, a rumor had been circulating for the last several hundred years that the successive Emperors of Britannia were able to wield tremendous authority at will because generation after generation possessed a supernatural ability that transcended human understanding.

"That's probably true, Oz. Considering your own abilities, it's entirely possible," Wizard's words didn't have a hint of ridicule in them. "The 'Seer' was the hidden ruler of Europe long before anyone like me was born. It is even said that the 'Seer' was always present at military and economic inflection points over the past few

decades. The reason why the ‘Seer’ was able to exert such influence for so long was because he was able to maintain his position among the most powerful people in each era.”

“At the same time, that also increased his number of enemies.”

“That's right. Now that the ‘Seer’ has joined the Euro-Britannians, his existence has become an eyesore for the E.U., which once valued him so highly.”

Wizard revealed that assassination attempts against the “Seer” have been tried many times before, but that every attempt had failed.

“Nevertheless, this here is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, have you ever heard of Shovalov Bezekirsky?” Wizard said.

“Bezekirsky is the treasurer of Euro Britannia—the one in charge of its finances behind the scenes.”

“As expected. That's right. Thus simultaneously he’s also the person in charge of procuring war funds which Britannia can’t reveal publicly. Thus, Bezekirsky asked for asylum in the E.U.”

“Did they accept? Is there a possibility that this is a diversionary operation?”

“No oversight like that. He's the real deal. But that’s not the problem.”

According to Wizard’s explanation, when Bezekirsky contacted the E.U. agent a gunfight broke out. As a result, Bezekirsky suffered serious injuries.

“If he's alive, then what's the problem?” Orpheus asked.

“When accepting Bezekirsky's defection, the E.U. was presented with the task of carrying out the terms of the exchange which had become impossible.”

The E.U. thrusted conditions on Bezekirsky—that being the assassination of the "Seer". So, Bezekirsky was to have a meeting with the "Seer".

"That meant this was a 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity, didn't it……"

"It was nearly impossible to get close to the 'Seer'. This was the biggest obstacle to his assassination. So the E.U. wanted to seize this opportunity no matter what. But just when it looked like it might be possible, their MVP, Bezekirsky, was injured."

"I read you loud and clear. You're asking me to serve as Bezekirsky's replacement, right?"

"That's it."

Fortunately, Bezekirsky's defection was not yet known to Euro Britannia. The agent who'd noticed him was killed in the gunfight.

"However, it's only a matter of time before that matter is discovered, so I want to win the battle before then," Wizard said.

"There's no reason to refuse. However, let's confirm why it has to be me. As you should know, my power is only effective against humans. That is, if the 'Seer' uses a card-key system for security, then there's no point, right?"

"I'm aware of that. The target isn't using any such device. It appears that he doesn't trust the cameras or sensors."

"Then, one more thing. If this was a normal assassination, it would've been quicker and easier to disguise an agent as Bezekirsky. Why didn't they do that?"

"I told you earlier, Oz. The 'Seer' can see through disguises. No disguise will work on him… no matter how much you change your appearance."

"If that's the case, isn't it the same thing if I go? Because no matter the disguise, you said it would be ineffective, right?"

“You see. That's the main point—the ‘Seer’ is blind,” Wizard said.

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Orpheus, who copied Bezekirsky’s appearance, had passed in front of the Seer without him getting suspicious. The real Bezekirsky, whom Orpheus met two hours ago, was currently in the ICU. Wizard had estimated that he had about three hours left before his defection was discovered. By then, Orpheus must’ve completed the assassination.

The Seer was a stout old man. His face was covered in deep wrinkles created by loose skin, making it difficult to even make out his expression. As Wizard had said, his cloudy white eyes indicated that he’d lost his vision a long time ago, but judging from his surprisingly agile movements considering his age, it was clear that he wasn’t inconvenienced by it in his daily life.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Seer,” Orpheus expressed his gratitude to the Seer for accepting his visit.

There was no way to know whether his impersonation of Bezekirsky was having any effect. However, he had no choice but to believe in the experience he’d gained in actual combat, which showed that his ability didn’t trick the opponents’ sight and hearing, but rather their brains themselves.

Orpheus measured the distance between himself and his target. It was customary for the Seer and his visitors to have meetings together with no other people involved. This time is no exception. It was just him and his opponent in the conference room.

Of course, bringing weapons was never considered from the beginning. From Bezekirsky's point of view, being armed was out of the question. Of course, it wasn't a big deal. All he had to do was break his opponent's neck with his bare hands.

Orpheus had received explanations from Bezekirsky in advance, therefore he started explaining Euro Britannia's financial state of affairs. That is, he opened with behind the scenes economic conditions that anyone other than Bezekirsky couldn't know of by it being filled with information. However, the Seer didn't listen to the explanation for even a minute before he raised his flabby, fat hand and motioned as if for him to be silent.

"Normal affairs are good enough," he said. "As for this war, Britannia's victory is assured at present. I don't need to read the stars to know that. Even a foolish child could see it."

The Seer stared motionlessly at Orpheus's face with his white cloudy eyes.

"More than that, I'm interested in reading the way of your star," he said, meaningfully and smiling.

Orpheus felt a chill. He never felt such discomfort before. No—he remembered that feeling. Yes—that time.

"That's certainly strange, you know. For you, I see two stars overlapping each other."

"Two..."

Before he knew it, he'd repeated him like a parrot.

"They attract each other, then the stars repel each other. What a fateful situation—for they're inseparable entities determined to be rivals. And soon, the paths of their fates will intersect as one."

"Their fates... will intersect..." Orpheus muttered.

The Seer fixated on Orpheus with his unseeing eyes.

"Well then, this is indeed a strange tale, Bezekirsky. My judgment tells me that you are unmistakably Shovalov Bezekirsky. However, it seems that your star cannot possibly belong to Bezekirsky. It's out of proportion. Such brilliance is beyond comparison with the dull light of someone like Bezekirsky. Who are you? Why…do you have the brilliance of Geass in your stars?"

"!"

Orpheus jumped up as if he had been shot. He thrusted his hands out, aiming for the Seer's thick neck. —However,

Lightning erupted from the conference room ceiling, Orpheus's motor nerves were instantly overpowered. Orpheus fell silently on the spot. His limbs didn't listen to what he told them to do and twitched little by little.

"You came to kill me, right Geass user? Your tongue is paralyzed, therefore you can't even speak, right?"

The Seer looked intently into Orpheus's face, whose eyes were wide open and unable to blink, and laughed.

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Undeniably, Orpheus didn't know how long it had been since he'd been captured. It's been said that depending on the awareness of the person experiencing it, one's sense of time lengthens or shortens. How long had it taken to remove all of the fingernails from both his hands? 10 minutes? Or 10 hours? Regardless, even after the last nail was torn off, Orpheus remained completely silent without uttering so much as a single word.

"You know I looked you up, Geass user," the Seer said. "Just who in the hell are you? Are you part of the E.U.? Or perhaps are you related to the people I sent to the execution site?"

Orpheus spat out a broken molar. He looked at the Seer's face through the slits of eyelids, swollen shut from having been beaten so badly.

"...Try telling my... fortune."

"Hmm. Perhaps, was it the Geass Order who sent you, I wonder? Are you here to neutralize me?"

The Geass Order. The moment Orpheus heard that name, he nearly involuntarily screamed. The Seer—this old man knew about the Geass Order. Orpheus realized the true nature of the discomfort he felt. The aura that surrounded the Seer was very similar to the one worn by the members of the Geass Order. Orpheus blamed his carelessness for not realizing this immediately after meeting the Seer.

"The Britannians want to take you into custody. I'm sure that you'll be willing to tell us all about it then," and at that, the Seer laughed.

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The officer of the convoy unit who arrived to take Orpheus away informed him that the ones interrogating Orpheus wouldn't be the Britannian regular army, but Pluton—a shadowy organization that carried out tasks the Britannian Imperial Family couldn't publicly disclose. That was the name of the organization that killed Euliya,

the only person Orpheus had ever trusted. However, in front of the enemy he hated, Orpheus was utterly powerless.

Only this far?... Euliya...!

As Orpheus was dragged out in front of the Seer's residential mansion, his body trembled with uncontrollable regretful thoughts.

At that moment—as the convoy unit's motorcade blew up it exploded into flames. The remaining troops who escaped the initial attack and the soldiers guarding the mansion hastened to turn around in order to prepare a counterattack.

The Sutherlands and Glasgows accompanying the convoy fired their machine guns at the location where the attackers were believed to be hiding.

Evading that line of fire, a black shadow appeared and resolved into Knightmare—the Agravian. Wizard's unit.

The Agravian's shots landed so as to encircle Orpheus's position. The soldiers who were detaining Orpheus were vaporized instantly and disappeared into a crimson mist. Although their blood spray entirely covered him, Orpheus's body stood with unwavering stillness.

"Are you safe, Oz?" Wizard asked from the cockpit as the Agravain became Orpheus's shield and his safety was ensured.

"Still alive," Orpheus answered.

"Let's retreat, Oz."

"No, not yet. I haven't finished the mission yet."

He could sense Wizard laughing underneath his mask.

"I thought you'd say that."

Wizard sent a transmission. What appeared in response was the Byakuen. Zi was in the cockpit.

"Oz……!"

Zi paled upon seeing Orpheus's body, horribly injured by torture.

"Those guys... I'll blow every last one of them away!"

"We have more important things to do than that. Follow my words accordingly with the gun's sights, Zi," Orpheus said.

With his hands entirely deprived of fingernails, he wouldn't be able to operate the Byakuen as desired.

"Leave the enemy to me."

With that said, Wizard charged the Agravain towards the enemy.

Zi followed Orpheus' instructions and aimed the Type Seven Integrated Weapons.

"I don't like settling things like this—but once I accept a job, I will complete it to the end. This is my fang!"

Orpheus pulled the trigger with his hand supported by Zi.

The shell fired with the high-pitched sound unique to electromagnetic guns and flew into the mansion headed straight for the innermost room—the room where the Seer lived.

"Oh! The stars! The stars are shining!"

Those were the last words spoken by the Seer.

Disclaimer note:

This document include the English translations of the chapters that make up the first volume of Code Geass: OZ The Reflection Side: Orpheus, which was originally published as a photo story in Hobby Japan between 2012 and 2014.

The first nine chapters were originally translated by Eternal Dreamer, and their translations can still be found on their website. Chapter 10 was translated by Hrut, who has also translated all the chapters of the OZ The Reflection and OZ The Reflection O2 manga, available in their translation project folder. As I will soon be uploading my translations of the second and third volumes, I thought it would be helpful to compile these earlier translations of the first volume here, with a few corrections to improve consistency and readability where necessary.

I am not an expert in translation, so I have included the Japanese raws for each chapter in the folder containing this compilation; I usually work with the aim of balancing fidelity to the original text with a smooth translation. Since English is not my native language, I have enabled the suggestion feature in the folders for each chapter and would greatly appreciate any feedback regarding errors or areas for improvement.

—Mirai